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SHORT STORIES

EDITED BY C. ARTHUR PEARSON (OF PEARSON'S WEEKLY)

No. 527. FOR WEEK ENDING FEBRUARY 4TH, 1899. [ONE PENNY.

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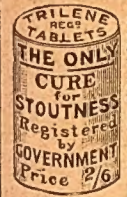

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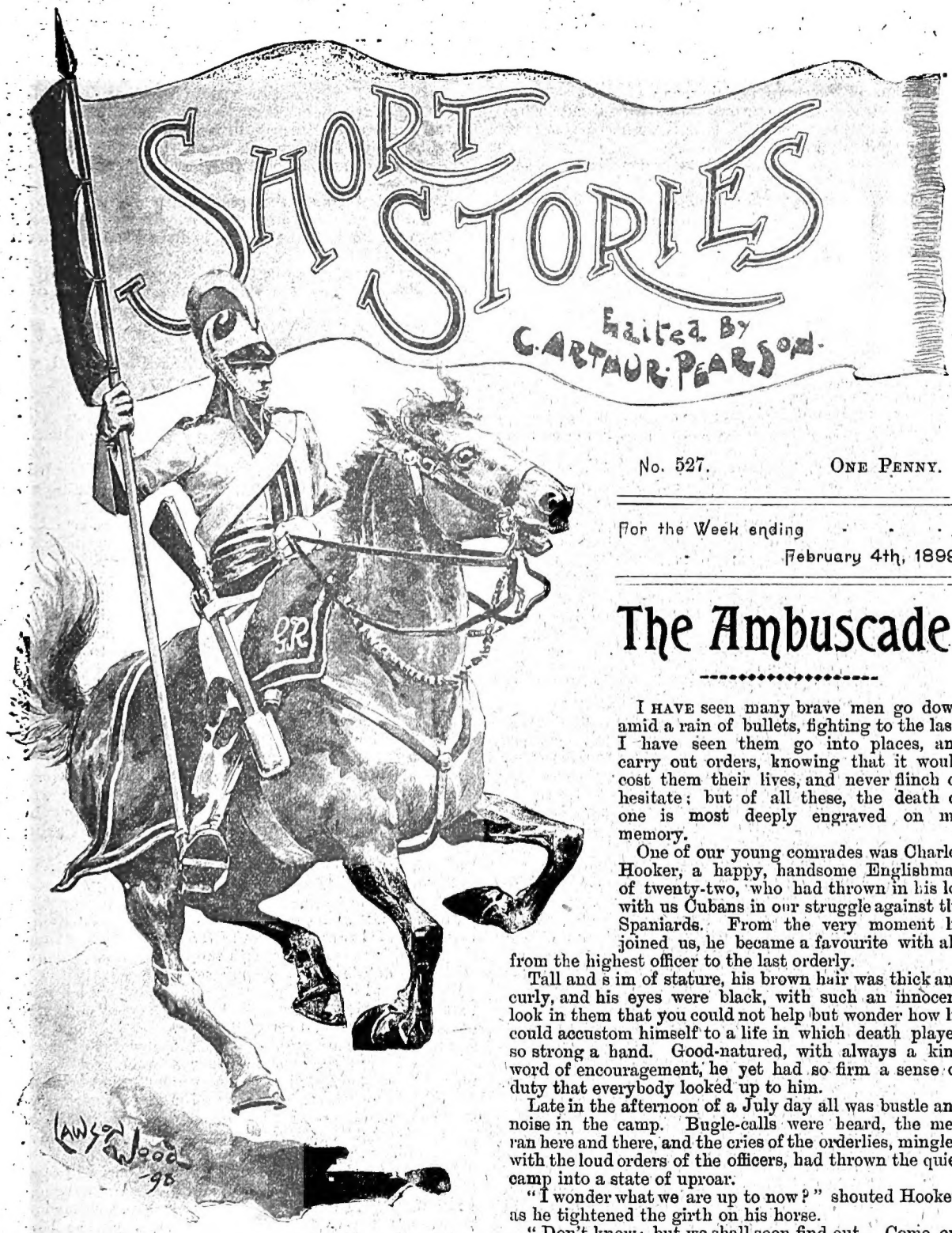

No. 527. ONE PENNY.

For the Week ending
February 4th, 1899.

The Ambuscade.

I HAVE seen many brave men go down amid a rain of bullets, fighting to the last. I have seen them go into places, and carry out orders, knowing that it would cost them their lives, and never flinch or hesitate; but of all these, the death of one is most deeply engraved on my memory.

One of our young comrades was Charles Hooker, a happy, handsome Englishman of twenty-two, who had thrown in his lot with us Cubans in our struggle against the Spaniards. From the very moment he joined us, he became a favourite with all, from the highest officer to the last orderly.

Tall and slim of stature, his brown hair was thick and curly, and his eyes were black, with such an innocent look in them that you could not help but wonder how he could accustom himself to a life in which death played so strong a hand. Good-natured, with always a kind word of encouragement, he yet had so firm a sense of duty that everybody looked up to him.

Late in the afternoon of a July day all was bustle and noise in the camp. Bugle-calls were heard, the men ran here and there, and the cries of the orderlies, mingled with the loud orders of the officers, had thrown the quiet camp into a state of uproar.

"I wonder what we are up to now?" shouted Hooker, as he tightened the girth on his horse.

"Don't know; but we shall soon find out. Come on, or you'll be late for formation," I answered, springing into the saddle and trotting down into my place in the line.

Horses were saddled, straps were tightened and accoutrements hastily buckled on. The line was soon formed, and, as we stood at attention while Captain Planas was inspecting us, we were wondering why we were called out at so late an hour; for it was five o'clock, and all of us knew that at that time no danger was to be feared from the enemy.

"Squadron! Right by fours! Column right! March!" rang out in rapid succession, and we walked our horses

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slowly out of the camp, noticing, as we did so, that only two squadrons besides our own were leaving, and that all the impedimenta, together with the rest of the force, remained behind.

Slowly we rode along, and as hunger is not a very good promoter of conversation, it soon lagged, and the silence was broken by the tramp of the horses' hoofs and an occasional remark from one of the men.

Disgust at the prospect of spending a long, cold night without a fire, joined to the gnawing of an empty stomach, had succeeded in throwing me into a wretched humour, and as I rolled over my blanket and answered with a grunt Hooker's cheerful "Good-night" I mentally made a vow to make someone pay for my feelings on the morrow.

Large clouds blew up, and for a moment covered the moon. Some drops of rain began to fall, but still the tired men slept on, Captain Planas alone remaining awake; the responsibility of the ambuscade lay on his shoulders, and, young in command, he felt too anxious to rest.

"Three o'clock," he muttered, as he glanced at his watch. "Sentry, pass the word to wake the men—and no one is to talk," he added, addressing the guard.

"Now, men," he continued, as we hastily sprang to our feet, "you are not to fire until I command, no matter what happens. Fire low and true. Remember that I have pledged my word to capture the convoy, and I know that I can rely on you all. Let each man choose his tree, and, above all, no noise, and await the order; then, aim well, and fire."

Silently the men took their places, and for a moment the click of springs could be heard as we examined our rifles; then, once more all was still.

The first rays of dawn were lightening up the sky when, at the turn of the road, some four hundred yards away, a solitary horseman came in sight—the advance scout of the convoy. Slowly he came on, looking from side to side, his gun shining in his hand.

How handsome and soldierly he looked, I thought, as his horse carefully picked his way along the stony road; at that moment a hundred rifles were probably levelled at him, ready to speed the messengers of death on their way, had prudence not forbidden a movement.

Nearer and nearer he came, behind him could be seen some one hundred men—the vanguard.

Already the first horseman was abreast of the ambush. Would he see us? If so, all was lost. We could hear the creaking of his accoutrements as he almost brushed against us. Now the main body was in sight; in the midst of them could be seen twenty or thirty pack mules —the coveted convoy.

I glanced at Hooker at my side. His patient manner never seemed to abandon him, but the colour that came and went on his fair cheeks, together with a hasty look which now and then he cast at our captain, told me that, although he could control his feelings, he was as impatient as I for the fight to begin. All knew that the moment for action was fast approaching.

There was the tramp, tramp of the troops as, with a steady shuffle, on they advanced.

My blood rushed to my head, a choking sensation seized my throat. I held my breath lest it should betray our presence. I could feel every pulse in my body throb as, crouched behind a tree, I aimed and awaited the signal.

Still on they came. Twenty feet away was the commanding officer, his eyes and ears on the alert. Would the order never come?

At last! "Fire!" and the roar of three hundred rifles rent the air, re-echoing through the woods; the shouts of the officers and surprised men, the clatter of hoofs, and the sharp notes of the bugle, threw the peaceful scene of a moment before into the confusion and noise of battle.

At the first volley the enemy gave way; but now they rallied and returned our fire. It was give and take, and I knew that we were in for a hard, stubborn fight.

A square was formed by the Spaniards, in the middle of which were placed the loaded mules. As fast as one went down his carcass was dragged to the front, and soon a rampart was formed, from behind which the enemy knelt and fired.

The order had been given by Captain Planas, and we had closed in, completely surrounding the square.

Side by side Hooker and I fought, and as I occasionally caught sight of him through the smoke I saw him firing, his hat off and his cheeks rosy with the excitement of battle.

On all sides men went down; some lay still, while others writhed and groaned in frightful agony, calling on their more fortunate companions to end their misery; while in the midst calmly stood Captain Planas, bending now and then to soothe a wounded soldier, urging and encouraging his men, unmindful of his own safety.

Cries of derision and defiance came from the square, answered by similar ones from us.

Suddenly a shout went up. Over-confident, Captain Planas had advanced too near; a bullet had struck him in the breast, and he fell, calling on us to avenge him.

Dismayed at our loss, we hesitated, and began to yield; a panic seemed to seize us, and death, of which we had not thought before, now appeared in all its horror.

The Spaniards, seeing our condition, took courage, nd poured their deadly volleys into our ranks. Defeat and disgrace stared us in the face; the battle seemed lost. But the tide of the fray was turned by Hooker.

Grasping Cuba's torn and tattered flag of victory in one hand, his machete in the other, this young Briton called on the men to follow him, and looking neither to the right or left, he dashed headlong into the square.

The men, amazed as they were by his bravery, obeyed by one common impulse, and horrible carnage ensued.

In the midst of the square stood the young Englishman the blood running down his face from a cut on his forehead, his eyes shining with the light of a brave man who fears not death, but dishonour.

In his hand he still held the flag for which he was dying, while with his machete he kept at bay a burly Spaniard who cut and slashed at him.

All around men fought and fell; the weakest heart grew strong and the hand struck true as the men gazed on the brave young fellow who was now leading them.

Like wild beasts we fought, well-nigh exhausted by our efforts, and desperate at the loss of our captain.

The onslaught was too strong to resist; the enemy broke and ran. The day was won.

But how much had it cost us! For as I looked I saw Hooker standing for a moment amid the dead and dying, a ray of light, as it stole through the smoke, lighting up his pale but happy face. Slowly he sank back, the flag pressed to his bosom, and, as with uncovered head I knelt by his side, he smiled and passed away.

That night we sadly laid him to rest, wrapped in the flag for which he braved death and died.

M. R. Dennis.

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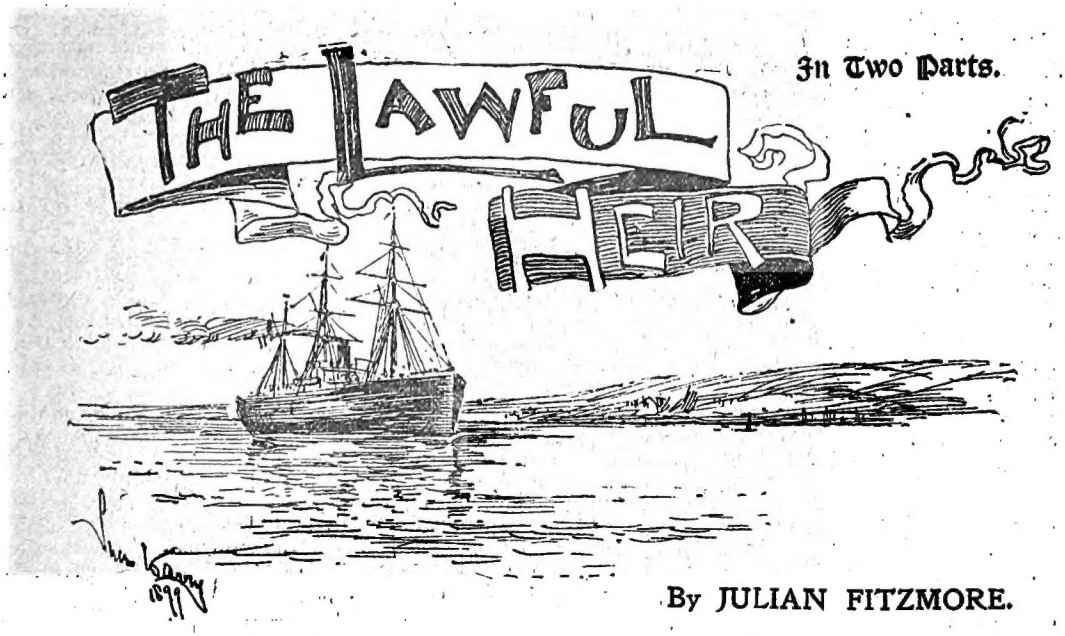

In Two Parts.

By JULIAN FITZMORE.

CHAPTER I.

Far Away from Home.

IN a log cabin in the backwoods of America sat one warm summer's evening a man, with a youth of nineteen years or so by his side. It was quite in the doorway of the cabin that they sat, for the day had been one of Canada's very hottest, and scarcely a breath of air was to be obtained, so sultry had it been for many hours. The shade of the porch was therefore extremely comforting and refreshing to these two who had toiled vigorously during the day in the Canadian forest at their regular work of lumbermen.

It was hard, trying work, that of a lumberman and a backwoodsman. For above nineteen years had the elder man, now probably fifty years of age, been engaged in it, and though the life was healthy enough, yet one with only a fragile constitution at the start, and whose previous life had not been such as to fit him for this work, the labour endured for so long had in the end begun to tell. The elder man, therefore, was going grey, and had the worn face and general tired look that one associates usually with a premature ending of life. Of late these symptoms had been more than previously plain, even to the man himself.

When he had first arrived, nearly twenty years ago, from the north of England, at that Canadian spot, utterly alone except for the dear girl who had accompanied him from London as his wife, he had had great hopes of the happiness that was in store for him, and had looked with all a young husband's joyful anticipations at the long future stretching before him in the society and friendship of one he so loved. And Carla, his wife, had returned his love with interest, and had as bright ideas of the future, and of the happiness she would make for him, as ever wife had in this world. They were wholly absorbed in each other, and they knew what each had given up for the other. For it had been a case of mutual self-sacrifice, though the man had given up by far the most.

Conrad Walker, for so he now called himself, had belonged to a family of high reputation in his native land, and had, being the only son, been the heir to all its tithes, dignities, and income. But when he fell in love with Carla Hanley, the daughter of a retired merchant of Clapham, and announced his intention of marrying her, the anger of his parents knew no bounds, and he was threatened with all sorts of pains and penalties if his foolish ideas, as they termed them, were persisted in.

Well, Conrad was just one of that sort to persist in such a case. Though his bodily strength was slight, and his health only delicate, especially at that time, his determination and mental ability were by no means small; and when he was thus so strongly opposed, it only made him the more resolute.

"You'll leave here," had said his father, after an angry interview; "you'll leave here, sir, at once if you marry that girl. And more than that; there are some things I can't hinder you having; but I can hinder you having my wealth, which is my own, and what is more I will, for I swear you shall never touch a penny of it if you carry out your absurd proposal. You, who could marry half the eligible ladies in the land, to go and throw yourself away on a bit of a retired grocer's daughter! I'm too ashamed, sir, to say more. You must take your choice, and if you don't please me, you go out of my house for ever, at least, whilst I live."

And Conrad didn't please him, and went. He and Carla got married and went out to Canada.

"We're better there, Carla," he had told her in London. "No one will know us, as no one will know where we have gone. It will be a nine days' wonder, my disappearance, and the papers will talk about it for a time, but it will soon cease, and we meantime shall have ourselves and our love. As for titles and estates, well, nobody gets to Heaven any sooner for a title that ever I heard of, and if thousands of acres of forest in Canada are not estates enough I don't know what is."

So they went and were satisfied. The story of the romantic marriage, of the mysterious disappearance

of bride and bridegroom, of the anger of the latter's parents, interested England for some days, then gradually passed away from most people's memories.

And when Carla gave to Conrad their first little baby-boy their bonds of love were complete. It was with such a smile that she looked at her husband the first time he held the babe in his arms, and said:

"What shall we call him, Conrad?"

And the man answered gravely:

"'William,' my dear, at any rate. Every first-born of our family is a 'William' as I am; though now disguised with my new name."

The dark eyes of the mother looked lovingly on her boy.

"Yes, it must be 'William,'" she said. Then, after a pause, "Shall you ever tell him, Conrad, who he really is as he grows up?"

The husband looked thoughtful.

"Not so far as I think at present," replied he. "There may be circumstances demanding it, but, after all, happiness is the greatest thing in life, and if one is happy, what does it matter whether he is a backwoodsman or the heir to——"

And he laughed.

"You are happy, Conrad?" she asked.

"Perfectly, little one," said he. "I have never repented our coming here."

"Nor I, my love."

And that home happiness went on so serenely and beautifully till that dark day five years later when Carla, after a brief attack of pneumonia, passed from the world's happiness to the fuller happiness above, and left Conrad alone with the boy, sorrowful and heart-broken.

It took him a long time to get over the blow. Had it not been for thoughts of that young boy he would probably not have got over it at all. But the necessity of keeping up and looking after William, gave him strength, and at last time gradually softened the effects of the ruthless shock.

And William had grown and grown, year by year, till here he was at nineteen, tall and strong beyond his years, for the Canadian climate takes some beating for bracing one up.

But for some time now the father had felt his own strength failing, and with this came the serious question, oft-debated, as to whether he ought to tell his son of what was really his position and right, or whether it would be better to leave him in blissful ignorance, to go on, and spend his life in Canada, as he himself had intended him doing, before the death of the mother made all go wrong, so to speak.

It was a severe struggle, and was not easily decided. Perhaps a change of air would do even himself good. So he decided, as he sat by the boy's side on this summer evening, that he would have a holiday. He would go for a week or two to England and take the boy with him. It would be some consolation to feel that his son had looked over those estates which were now in another's possession, for his own father had died, so he had learnt from English papers, some years ago, and his mother, too; and another, a distant cousin, had come into that which should rightly have been his. Ay, and that which was his yet, if he only cared to claim it! And with this thought arose the oft-recurring question, as to whether he was acting rightly in keeping his son out of his due.

But he had now determined. He would go and see how things were going, and how all looked after this twenty years of absence. Nobody would recognise him or know his son. He could sleep and stop in the little county town itself without any fear of that, and he would benefit by his native air, no doubt.

Having finally made up his mind he spoke to the boy at his side, whilst he lovingly stroked the wavy chestnut hair, so exactly like what *hers* had been.

"William," said he, "would you like to go to England for a holiday?"

The boy's eyes gleamed, as he took his father's hand.

"Oh, dad, it would be splendid! So grand to see London, and the Queen, and the Abbey, and all those lovely places you've so often told me all about. And the pretty house where you used to live, dad, in Durham, was'nt it, you said? Oh, I should like it, and no mistake!"

"Right you are, my boy," said his father, more gaily than he had done for some time. "We'll go, William; it will do me good, I daresay."

And a fortnight later the steamship *Umbria*, from New York, carried two passengers, whose berths had been taken comparatively late, booked for Liverpool. And more than one of those on board remarked on the close friendship, love, and resemblance that existed between the father and the son.

CHAPTER II.

The Honourable Eva Porton.

PORTON LODGE was situated some five or six miles north of the river Tees, which, as everyone knows, forms the boundary line between the counties of Durham and Yorkshire. It was an ideal stately home of the English aristocracy, going back in its chief building and design to the time of Henry VII., though it had had so many alterations and improvements made in it during the Elizabethan period that most people, at first sight, would have taken it for an Elizabethan house.

The building was of red brick, and on the front formed three sides of a large square, the centre part of which was occupied by a large fountain and well-laid-out flower beds, encircled by a wide carriage drive. In front of this square the ground sloped gradually down, facing the park, over which the eye ranged in a splendid view for miles, passing over the country, and finally resting on the large industrial town five miles away, where black smoke and dark sky indicated the never-ceasing energy of commerce.

Yet all was so tranquil and peaceful, so suggestive of rest and beauty in this domain of Porton Lodge, that it seemed scarcely possible to realise the nearness of that place to the town already spoken of. Far more in keeping was it with the old country town of Wellcaster, seen from the back of the house, at a distance of only two miles. Wellcaster was an ideal English country town, with all the usual concomitants of that factor of agricultural life. To-day, being market day, its chief street, about five or six yards wide, was filled with stalls of all kinds, whose proprietors were ready to do business in any shape or form. There was, besides, a horse or two for disposal; and some half-dozen cows, lying leisurely in the cobble-paved roadway, were also for sale, if anyone wished to buy.

Amidst all this busy and picturesque scene, the waggonette which run every market day between the industrial town and Wellcaster, came lumbering heavily into the market square. It was so usually empty that

the spectacle of two passengers, with a fair amount of luggage, would have been sufficient to draw universal attention, had it not chanced that at that very moment the "hall carriage," as it was called, with the Honourable Eva Porton inside, had drawn up just before the door of The Bull, and the footman had descended from his perch, resplendent in yellow livery, to go inside the inn on some business of his master's. The waggonette, whose rendezvous was The Bull, drew on one side till the carriage had left.

The young lady inside the carriage saw the motion, and standing up whispered to the coachman to pull to the other side of the street, so as to let the waggonette come to its accustomed position. A lifting of the hat, and a profound bow from each of the two passengers of the waggonette, together with a "Thank you, madam," suggested to the lady herself that, despite their tanned countenances and evident familiarity with hard work, the visitors appeared above the average rank of country trippers.

She mentioned the subject to her father, the Earl, as they sat at dinner.

On their side it must be confessed that the young lady had very favourably impressed Mr. Conrad Walker and Mr. William Walker, for my readers will have guessed that the two passengers and our two Canadian visitors were identical. The beautiful, fairy-like girl of eighteen years, with her laughing brown eyes, her golden hair, and her plain yet charming white muslin dress, looked as pretty as any English girl possibly could, which is saying much.

But hers, as was evident to the two visitors, was not only a physical beauty; there was a beauty of even a higher range still in Eva Porton's face and figure—the beauty of a genial, happy smile; the beauty of perfect health and enjoyment; the beauty of trying to do good and help those who were not so well off as herself. And never had she looked better, or more lovely, than she did on this September day when first the eyes of William Walker—William "Porton"—had she and he only known, met her.

"Who is the young lady in the carriage?" asked Mr. Walker, the elder gentleman, of the ostler at the inn, as that worthy proceeded to take charge of the luggage.

"That's the lady from the Lodge, sir, the Honourable Eva Porton," whispered the ostler, as if half afraid she might hear him. "And a wonderful good'un she is, too, sir," he added.

"Well-liked?" queried the backwoodsman.

"I should just think so, indeed," said the other. "Folks half worship her. You see she's so vastly different from the ——, I mean from some in the family," muttered he apologetically, as if recalling to mind that discretion is often advisable.

"You mean the Earl?" asked the elder man, with a curious smile, and half hesitation, as he pronounced the last word.

The ostler gave a sickly grin and nodded; then, fearing he might be lured to further imprudence if he stayed, hurried off to attend to business, whilst the two visitors gave another look at the young lady, whose carriage, the footman's business being now concluded, was preparing to drive away.

The Hon. Eva Porton, on her part, had stolen more than one surreptitious look at the manly faces of the two strangers, and had seemed to find an especial interest in the tall, well-made form and face of Mr. William, if one might judge by her repeated glances at him. And through the whole of that day, though there were many things that occupied her mind, and many duties to which she had to give close attention, yet somehow or other there was constantly looming before her mental eyes, as she sat up in the dainty boudoir that overlooked the country town, the figure of a tall youth of about twenty years of age, grave, yet with keen, honest, dark eyes, and that bold, fearless look on his face which has won so many battles, and conquered so many foes, both in love and war. Eva Porton was wondering who the stranger was, and who the gentleman with him, evidently his father, was, and how she could learn their identity without disclosing her own interest.

How many women have studied this question in the history of the world?

She mentioned the subject to her father, the Earl, as

they sat at dinner that evening, in a sort of casual way, after a question of his had nicely paved the way for it.

The Earl of Aldergate was not at all like his daughter, either in face or disposition. A hard, grasping man, with a very haughty mien, and a sort of "Don't you know I'm somebody particular?" air about him; and there were very few people amongst his acquaintances, and fewer still amongst his dependents, who cared for the Earl of Aldergate or for his wife either. He had come into the title and estates some fifteen years ago, when, after an interval of waiting, and no claimant appearing, on the death of the old Earl, on behalf of the only son William Porton, who had left home and never since been heard of, there seemed no reasonable ground for further belief that he or his heirs were living.

The present Earl had been a distant cousin, living in the extreme South of England, and never by any chance visiting the family in Durham; hence he had only once seen the missing William Porton, and that was when the latter was a child. At first, on coming to Wellcaster to Porton Lodge, he had done so with much pleasure, yet with some anxiety and misgiving, as there was no knowing when the missing heir might turn up and dispute his claim to the succession only too well.

But now that fifteen years, or nearly that, had passed by, these fears had long since gone, and his Lordship was now in no dread of that which had formerly cost him so many sleepless hours. He was in power, a landlord and a county man to be feared, and he knew it, and gave men occasion to fear him rather than to love him.

In this he was ably seconded by his wife, who was his second spouse, the Hon. Eva Porton being his only child by his first wife, who had died some years ago. There were no children by this second marriage, though Lady Aldergate had two sons by her first husband, one of whom—Herbert Blair—was not far from being the same age as Eva, being, in fact, some six months older. But none of these were at all in favour with the Wellcastrians or their neighbours, except the Hon. Eva herself.

All this and much more the two travellers learnt, by judicious inquiries, that night from the landlord of The Bull.

"She's a dear, Miss Eva, she is," repeated that worthy for the tenth time. "Why, bless you, gentlemen, you should have seen how she looked after old Mrs. Bridgeman at the lodge when the old soul had the fever, and how she spent the whole day after the colliery explosion last year, in going about helping and comforting the poor families whose sons and fathers had been killed or hurt. Didn't people bless her! And they do say"—here mine host lowered his voice—"as her father, the Hearl, who thinks the world of her, though he is not vastly loved himself, made a regular row with her about her doing such dangerous things, he called them, as bothering in fevers and such like. But she only laughed, and said she'd take no harm! Eh, bless you, she's a good 'un, and a regular Durhamite!"

Almost at the same time the Earl was saying, at dinner, "Anything new in Wellcaster to-day, Eva? I could not ride over there myself."

And the girl laughed—did she blush just a little?—as she replied,

"Oh, yes, great news for Wellcaster, papa! Two strangers came up to The Bull to stay a few days, I suppose, whilst Wilkins was in there. Oh, yes, Wellcaster will be busy."

"With their tongues, I suppose, of course!" said the Earl. "The strangers were only tourists, I expect!"

"I should think so," she said. "Two gentlemen, rather good-looking, I thought."

"Eva always talks of 'good looks,' instead of 'high-breeding,'" put in the Countess. "Really, if everyone were judged by their looks ——"

"Well, Eva, is young yet, my dear," said the Earl, who saw a cloud gathering, and hastened to try and stop its bursting.

"I'm aware of it," said the Countess, "and I hope she'll soon get settled and become wiser."

CHAPTER III.

An Adventure at the Church.

S has been stated, the Countess of Aldergate, second wife to the Earl, as he was her second husband, was not well liked in the district of Wellcaster. In fact, if the truth must be fully stated, she was very much disliked. The Earl himself had never succeeded in really gaining the affections of his tenants and neighbours, as other earls had before him. His disposition was not of that conciliatory mood which wins the respect of the inferiors for their superior in position, and makes them forget difference of rank, position, and circumstances in fellow-feeling for the man.

But the Countess was more than unpopular, she had many active enemies. And it must be confessed that she herself had made them so. From her first coming to Porton Lodge, on the accession of the Earl to his new dignity, she, who had only then been married to him for less than a year, at a time when she had had little idea of ever becoming a countess, since everybody expected that the real Earl would one day turn up, took upon herself to alter and change things and people which had been connected with the ancestral home of the Portons for more years than could readily be told.

There is nothing that sooner gains the ill-will, and dislike of old-fashioned country people, than to see some new upstart come and completely upset all their methods of procedure for years past; and if even the innovations be both more useful and practical than the older things they supplant, yet the country folk fail to grasp the beauty of the change, or its usefulness. But when it arises merely from pride, or from whim, there is apt to be a good deal more said than the delinquent would care to hear.

And Lady Aldergate had done all this, and gained the eternal disfavour of the Wellcastrians. Moreover, they had not forgotten the day when her Ladyship's carriage had run over little Tommy Wilkins, the son of Widow Wilkins, in the High-street, and when just as the coachman was going to pull up to see if the little fellow was badly hurt, her Ladyship had put out her head to beg him to drive on, and not keep her waiting there. And as her carriage rolled away down the High-street towards Porton Lodge, two miles away, there came into the market square a young lady on horseback, attended by a groom, who in obedience to his mistress's orders, assisted her to alight.

And the crowd, who had lately half hissed the Countess of Aldergate, gave a loving greeting to the Honourable Eva Porton, as she followed the man carrying Tommy Wilkins to his mother's house, and did not leave till she had seen that all had been done for him that possibly could be.

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It was the repetition of such acts as the above that had made her Ladyship's name received with anything but favour amongst the people of Wellcaster.

The two strangers from Canada heard all about it from the landlord and landlady of The Bull. The latter was as vehement in her dislike of the Countess and her sons as she was strong in her approval of the Hon. Eva.

"Two impident brazened lads as ever you need want to see, Sir, they are," said the worthy woman, addressing Mr. Walker. "If cheek and impertinence, to say nothing of pride, can get anything, they, like their mother, are going to have it. Why, I have heard say as how"—and here the hostess dropped her voice—"as how her Ladyship is trying to bring about a engagement between her eldest son, Mr. William Blair, and the Earl's daughter! If impidence can go farther than that, I'll have nothing for it. Why, Mr. William isn't fit to take her shoes off, he isn't, let alone to be her husband! Eh, me, it wor a sad day that the young Earl—I mean Mr. William Porton, as would have been the Earl—went away, and was never heard of again. I can just nicely remember him myself, and a grand lad he wor; everybody liked him. You know the tale about him, I suppose?"

The oldest of her two auditors acknowledged, hesitatingly, that he had heard it. Then, pausing, he asked, "And what finally became of him?"

"Well," went on the landlady, "nobody ever knew any more. It was rumoured he had been drowned at sea; and, again, that he had been killed by Indians in 'Merica. Anyhow, the old Earl and Countess never knew more before they died; they always thought he must have been drowned, as was stated, in crossing with his wife to 'Merica. As for her, nobody knew anything further. . . . What we should have done with the new Earl's family but for Miss Eva I can't tell. She's the one real 'scion' of the Portons, as my man, Timothy, calls her—one chip of the good old block. And she's so good and sweet that it makes me wild to think of that old woman thinking she ought to marry that bragging muff of a Master William Blair. It's simply shocking to think of it. But there's one good thing—there's no fear of it's happening; Miss Eva will have a word or two to say about that. And they do say that, though the Earl always has to give way to what her Ladyship thinks and wants, yet in this he is very strict—that there's to be no interference with Miss Eva's tastes and ways. Her ways are not her stepmother's, and he knows it. Well, it's something to his credit, anyhow."

On Sunday, Mr. Conrad Walker and Mr. William Walker attended service at the church of the country town. By this time all Wellcaster knew fully who they were, and where they came from, or thought it did—which is about the same for gossiping purposes. It was confidently asserted that they were South African merchants who had made a fortune, and were travelling through England to see the sights. And, of course, Wellcaster included itself amongst the sights!

Mr. William Walker did not disguise from himself, as he sat in the pew into which the verger had directed him and his father, that he was looking somewhat eagerly for the possible advent of his "fair lady" of the previous week; and that, when the family party arrived from Porton Lodge, his gaze was much more turned towards them than towards the clergyman.

Yes, she was there—as beautiful a girl as ever Heaven's sunlight rested upon; and she walked up the aisle so modestly, so unconsciously graceful in every motion and step, that the elder man, looking upon her, acknowledged what a queen she was, and did not wonder

She walked up the aisle so modestly.

that his son blushed, as he half stole glances at her fair form. She could not herself, of course, help noticing the strangers from her pew, which overlooked all the church, and so it was left to Mr. William's imagination to wonder what she thought.

When the service was over they met, by accident, outside in the country churchyard, the Earl's family and the two visitors. Eva carried her own prayer-book and hymn-book; it had been her gift from her own mother many, many years ago, and she valued it highly. What the cause might have been, she could not say—even in after years she declared laughingly it was a pure accident—but just as Mr. Walker and his son passed the girl, her prayer-book fell upon the path.

Probably it may have arisen from that agitation which does attack every daughter of Eve, however calm otherwise, at the sight of the man she loves; probably it may have been that her grasp of it was not as firm as usual; anyhow, it fell. And William Blair on the one side, and William Walker on the other side, both bent to pick it up, whilst the Countess looked round in half-disguised annoyance at what she called Eva's

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"carelessness," and the elder tourist smiled gaily as he saw his son reach hold of the little book ere his rival could touch it.

The girl took back her prayer-book, as the young man offered it with raised hat, with her sweetest smile, and William Walker's heart beat a shade quicker. She thanked him gently, so gently and sweetly—what a wonderfully sweet voice she had—for his kindness, whilst Mr. William Blair looked daggers at him.

"Eva, are you coming or not?" petulantly asked the Countess. "Why do you stand bothering there?"

"Because I have no right to be discourteous, mamma," said the girl. And with another smile at Mr. Walker, she went on.

"I don't know, Eva," said Mr. Blair, as they turned into Porton Park, "whatever you see in such low people as you tourists to thank them so effusively for what I should call 'blooming impertinence.' I should have picked up your book; he'd no need to have touched it."

"You may call it what you please," said the Hon. Eva gaily. "I call it kind and gentlemanly, and from the little I have seen and heard of these two gentleman in Wellcaster, they seem to me to be anything but low, and certainly not impertinent."

"Indeed," said Mr. Blair sarcastically, "indeed! I did not know you had taken them up amongst your friends! Perhaps we shall be having them as guests at your garden-party next Wednesday!"

"Perhaps you will," retorted the girl, stung by the insult as to almost forget what she was saying. "And if they were here, there would be two *gentlemen* more" —with an accent on the "gentlemen,"—"at any rate."

With which parting salute the young lady left him, and went to her own room.

The Countess said a few words to Miss Porton later on, on the same subject, not in a motherly way, but in a domineering, sneering manner. To her Eva returned much the same reply. "I knew," said her Ladyship, "I knew what it would be, and how you would receive my advice, Eva! I cannot, of course, make you do what I want, but I think you might consider what is due to me, due to the Porton family, before you put a slight on my son before strangers! And as to the garden-party, well, you'll do as you like, I suppose?"

"With father's permission I shall invite my friends, your Ladyship," replied the girl, "and you need not be afraid that either due deference will fail to you, or that the honour and pride of the Portons will suffer in my selection of guests for my birthday."

Of course the Hon. Eva Porton had never intended such a thing as inviting the two tourists, to whom she had not even been formally introduced, but when the Hon. Captain Jackson and Mrs. Jackson asked leave to bring two gentlemen friends with them, whom they were sure Lord and Lady Porton and the Hon. Eva Porton would be glad to know, the answer was naturally, "With pleasure," and so, to Eva's surprise, as well as inward joy, the next Thursday saw the two visitors at Porton Lodge.

CHAPTER IV.

The Garden Party.

THE Countess of Aldergate and the Hon. Eva Porton stood at the entrance of the hall of Porton Lodge receiving the guests who were invited to celebrate the eighteenth birthday of the younger lady. Some dozens had already arrived, and been welcomed. But the two visitors who were coming as friends of Captain and Mrs. Jackson had not yet put in an appearance, and Miss Eva stood somewhat eagerly watching for the arrival of their party. The Countess would much rather have preferred not having to welcome two "plebian fellows," as she had styled them in talking with her son, but needs must. She flattered herself that she was, after all, a lady and a member of the aristocracy, with whom all show of illwill or dislike was, to say the least, "bad form."

So having to make the best of a distasteful job, she had resolved to welcome them effusively as friends of the Jacksons, and then to monopolise Mr. Conrad Walker as much as possible for the rest of the afternoon. He must be exceedingly close and clever, she thought, if she, the Countess of Aldergate, could not get something out of him in the way of news or family matters that would repay her trouble, and serve to discourage the growing attraction that Miss Eva was finding in the younger man.

Strange to relate, though the usually sharp lady of Porton Lodge both felt and knew that some mystery attached to these two visitors, for whose stay week after week at The Bull she could find no adequate reason, seeing that Wellcaster's charms and attractions were soon gone over by most visitors, it never struck her at all to even think of the true solution. Years and years ago she had given up the idea of the real heir of Porton ever turning up again. She had made up her mind that he had died, childless, long ago, and years of unmolested possession with her husband of the estates and titles had only confirmed this view. So that the true solution of the mystery hanging around her two guests never presented itself to her mind.

They arrived at last, in company with the Jacksons, and were duly introduced by the latter to the Earl and Countess, as well as to the Hon. Eva Porton. The Earl received his guests in a quiet, gentlemanly way, as was to be expected from him. Even if he was not all that former holders of the title had been, yet his bearing on such occasions as this was beyond reproach.

As a garden party, with afternoon tea, the affair was a great success. Mr. Conrad Walker sauntered along the paths with a strange and curious feeling. All these scenes were so familiar to him, though it was twenty years ago since he had known them. How many times he had stood on that terrace, just as he stood now, and thought with pride upon the noble destiny that was before him, and upon the good he would try to do when, after his father's death, he should become Earl of Aldergate! All those walks in the shrubberies where he had, in younger days, played "hide and seek" with his nurse, and, when older, had paced with his school-book in his hand, vainly endeavouring to fix his mind on Roman History instead of cricket, he knew only too well again!

Those were happy days whilst they lasted. And then had come the separation, when, falling in love with Carla, his father and mother proving so obstinate, he had left them in anger to try his fortune in the New World, and discarded title and estates for ever, as he thought.

And he sighed deeply, so much so that the Countess, who was walking with him, rallied him on his gloominess and taciturnity.

"I beg your Ladyship's pardon for my forgetfulness," he said. "I was thinking of one of my old home-scenes, and how like to this it is."

Then ere she could reply, he motioned to a walk in

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the garden where his son and Miss Eva were strolling together, both looking thoroughly happy, and said:

"Let us go down there, and see how they are enjoying themselves, if you don't object. Ah, your Ladyship, enjoyment is not difficult when the heart is young and knows no cares!"

As they came up to the younger ones, they saw Eva smiling gaily at something William had said.

"You seem to be enjoying yourself here, Eva," said the Countess, rather sarcastically, "but you must not neglect your other guests."

"I beg your pardon, Miss Porton," said the young cavalier, bowing gracefully, "I had, in my selfishness, and the pleasure of your company, forgotten there were other guests. May I lead you back to the terrace?"

She took the offered arm, and they returned up the garden-walk.

"So you think you would like our Canadian life?" asked he, for it was that he had previously been describing to her.

"Oh, it must be splendid," she replied enthusiastically. "I am so fond of horses and of the woods, you know."

"We shall be very glad to entertain you if you care to come over any time for a holiday," said the youth, with a bright smile and a blush. "I think we can promise you some good sights."

"When are you thinking of returning, Mr. Walker?" she asked. And the eager listener would have detected a shade of quavering in her voice.

"Oh, I can't say yet, Miss Porton," he answered. "It depends on dad. But," and unconsciously he lowered his voice and spoke so gently, as she afterwards remembered, "I shall be very sorry to leave England—to leave this district."

"I shall be very sorry to leave England—to leave this district.

And even her maiden and aristocratic modesty gave way before her womanly curiosity and innate pleasure, as she asked with averted face,

"Shall you? Why, may I ask?"

He turned quickly, gave her a quiet look, such a look as always pierces to a woman's heart, and then replied with tremulous accents,

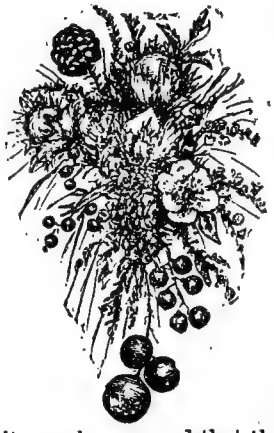
"Miss Porton, n ed you ask why?"

And as she silently withdrew her arm from his, they passed on the terrace amongst the other guests. Yet a great and fierce joy had taken possession of her heart, and she whispered with delight all through the day, "He loves me."

Many people made remarks on the loveliness and brightness of their young hostess that afternoon, and many also spoke with much pleasure of the two Canadian visitors, whose gracious manners and manly speech won all hearts.

"Do you know, Richard," said Mrs. Jackson to her husband as they drove home, after depositing their friends at The Bull, "I have such a feeling on looking at Mr. Conrad Walker's face that somehow I have seen it before. His son, too, gives me the same impression. And their very voices seem familiar."

"That is a feeling one often has, my dear," replied her husband, "with those one meets in various places. I quite understand it, though I am afraid it is only a feeling here, seeing that it is impossible you should



have known Mr. Walker anywhere before, as he has lived in Canada all his life, I understand."

"Do you know anything more about him beyond Briggs saying he was a man of good position and fairly well-to-do?" persisted Mrs. Jackson.

Briggs was the Wellcaster solicitor, whose family, in the lawyer line, was almost as old and respected in the county as was the Earl of Aldergate's. And as it may be stated here that Mr. Conrad Walker had paid more than one visit to Mr. Briggs, it may be assumed that the lawyer knew of what he was talking, when he had introduced his client to Mr. Jackson as a man of "position and well-to-do."

"I know from what Briggs said," went on Mr. Jackson in reply to his wife, "that Mr. Walker is a man worth knowing, I can tell you. The lawyer speaks enthusiastically of him as a gentleman and a business-man."

"Well, of course, I can't say," persisted the lady; "but the face and voice, especially in certain circumstances, seem intensely familiar to me, and yet I can't think whom they resemble. But did you see Miss Eva's decided preference for young Walker's company? I noticed it particularly. And I also observed the looks of disgust and gloominess upon the countenance of Mr. William Blair."

"I can't say I noticed it," remarked the gentleman. "Eva was all the same with everybody, as far as I saw."

"Oh, was she? Richard, it's surprising to me where you men put your eyes! Now, just mark my words. Eva Porton is in love with this young Mr. Walker, and he is in love with her. There'll be bad blood between him and Mr. Blair yet, you'll see. For everyone knows what the Countess and her son are planning."

Then Mrs. Jackson, who had been thinking, resumed.

"The Earl would never give his consent, you may be sure; her Ladyship would see to that. And the Portons are high-spirited. Even his Lord-hip is, if he were not so much under her dominion. Eva has her grandfather's spirit, who was more like a Porton than even the late Earl. There may be a noise yet in the family about this affair, for Miss Eva is not likely to give way to the Countess's wish about her marriage. We might have another elopement, or some such thing, as that of twenty years ago."

"Oh, dear, Matilda, how you do talk and imagine!" said Mr. Jackson, with a loud laugh.

But the words "elopement" and "twenty years ago" had set the lady thinking. And what she thought may be judged from the incredulous smile which slowly crossed her face as fancy thoughts flitted through her mind, till at last a broad smile rested there, and an involuntary "Oh," was ejaculated.

"What is it now?" queried her husband lazily.

"Nothing," said she, "I was only thinking."

And a smile rested on her face as she surveyed her husband, but it was that superior smile of pity at a man's dulness and ignorance which women know so well how to use. And Mrs. Jackson kept her secret to herself.

(To be concluded next week).

Result of 15th Sovereign Distribution.

No one applied for the sovereigns in this distribution. The following were the names selected:

W. Brown, Church Street, Wilmslow; W. Dunn, 92 Ludford Street, Crewe; Mrs. Howard, 13 Victoria Road, Runcorn; Thos. O'Brien, 6 Shop Street, Glenamaddy, Ballinasloe; Jas. Powell, Edvin Ralph, Worcester; Jas. Walker, 25 Prospect Place, Gravesend; J. Anderson, 19 Mapier Road, Luton; J. Foster, Beoley, Redditch; Miss M. Johnson, 27 New Mill Street, Dudley; W. Morrison, 5 Greig Street, Inverness; T. Scott, 14 Atlantic Avenue, Antrim Road, Belfast; A. Ward, High Street, Westerham, Kent; J. Leighton, 4 Lincoln Street, Nottingham; Miss F. Church, 7 North Terrace, Wisbeach; W. Gambold, 72 Walkin Street, Swansea; H. Keeling, Sun St. Potton, Sandy, Bedford; Jos. Rose, 14 Frank Street, Leicester; Jas. Tilbury, Ship Street, Wycomb, Bucks; H. Collins, 5 Albion Road, Lewisham; W. Horton, Market Street, Oakengates; E. Abberley, 4 Albert Street, Shrewsbury; Miss Forde, 35 Roman Street, Cork; A. Vickers, 17 High Street, Nantwich; S. McAdam, 21 Spencer Street, Belfast; W. Bird, 5 Lowfield Grove, Stockport; Mrs. Harbord, Seaside, Aldborough, Hull; John Leslie, 8 Chappel Street, Lowestoft; H. Trigg, 25 Albert Road, Richmond, Surrey; C. Winter, Eastwich Rectory, Harlow, Essex; T. Alston, 2 Turrall House, Turrall Street, Worcester; Mrs. Chouler, Ingleside, Kingsley Road, Northampton; G. M'Innes, 52 Seafield Road, Dundee; H. Scull, 7 Oakfield Street, Cardiff; Mrs. Anderson, 38 Kirk Gate, Newark-upon-Trent; H. G. Davies, 7 Lambton Road, Hornsey Rise; C. B. Woolpack, Godmanchester, Huntingdon; J. Treanor, Hill Street, Newry; E Wright, High Street, Middleton; T. Burman, Tennants Bridge, Libsey, Boston; G. Cook, Chantry, Headcorn, Ashford; Jos. Barrett, 1 Thames Street, Oxford; J. Fryer, 33 Benson Street, Linthorpe, Middlesborough; F. Hicklin, 3 Gerard Street, Derby; Thos. Davies, 6 Great Eastern Terrace, Neyland; W. Bailey, 13 Church Road, Ilfracombe, Devon; Miss Wilde, 49 Richmond Road, Stamford Hill; W. Tailby, 19 Wardsend, Loughboro; Isaac Clark, 120 Vicarage Road, Plumstead; A. Wheeler, 54 Bridge Street, Worksop; M. Carter, 85 Crown Road, Yarmouth.

A UTOPIAN SCHEME

would be for every reader of a paper to be his (or her) own Editor. Each one would then have exactly the reading required. For fair woman, HOME NOTES has filled the gap, for in it are there not numerous competitions with huge prizes, chats about children, talks about health and beauty, hints on house decoration, serial and short stories, fascinating fashions, and matters too numerous to mention?

IF YOU KNOW OF A BETTER STORY

THAN THE

"KETTLE" ADVENTURE

IN THE

February "Pearson's,"

NOW ON SALE,

WE SHALL BE GLAD TO PURCHASE IT FROM YOU.

Tragedy of a Girl's Life.

A RATTLE of musketry came from the direction of the village. The old grave-digger, Boloski, wakened by the noise, sat up on his miserable pallet, listened a moment to the sharp, quick reports, then called aloud: "Milena! Milena!"

"Coming, father, coming," she answered, and already the little naked feet showed themselves upon the rungs of the ladder which led from the loft.

"Did you hear them, Milena?" he cried, "the sounds of the gun shots? They are fighting in the village—" a violent attack of coughing interrupted his words, and another rattling volley.

Milena had descended just as she quitted her couch of straw—a young girl, tall, vigorous, and scantily draped in a brief chemise. She had thrown about her shoulders a short pelisse of sheepskin, but her Amazon hips showed themselves firm and beautiful under their light covering, and her breasts appeared an instant, white as polished marble, against the dead black fur.

"It is true, then!" said she, leaping the last steps; "it has come at last!"

"What, my child?" demanded the sick man.

"The Revolution has broken out to-night, which has been expected so long."

"Yes, and a great misfortune it is too," mumbled Boloski and he crouched again upon his couch. Milena meanwhile hurriedly arrayed herself in a wadded petticoat and her father's long boots. Binding a scarlet handerchief about her abundant locks, she went out to learn what was passing.
pelisse closer.

Below, in the heart of the valley, the village had delivered itself up to strife and bloodshed, yet here upon this sacred ground all was peace. A large cross rose in the middle of the inclosure, to which was attached the figure of the dying Saviour—icicles pendant from the thorns which crowned His brow and from the nails which pierced His hands and feet.

Milena listened intently—not a murmur for the moment broke the stillness. She stopped and gazed up at the heavens, the vast blue vault which seemed to her a satin canopy, retained in place by the golden nails which sparkled and scintillated above her, while beyond there, on the other side of the forest, rode the red disc of the rising moon.

All at once a gliding, crouching form passed her like a flash, a pair of glowing eyeballs glared into her own.

"A wolf!" she murmured, and, with an energetic movement, wherein shone all the savage strength of this child of nature, she seized a stone from the neighbouring wall, and threw herself forward. A low howl responded to the stroke of her arm, and the hungry beast was gone as it had come—a shadow—through those files of tombs and spectral crosses.

A fresh crash of musketry sounded in the distance, another, and still another. Milena traversed at a run the slope of the road which led to the village, and, at the beginning of the first houses, met a neighbour and a wounded man, the wife, whom she knew well, supporting the husband, whose blood dyed the snow at every step.

"What is the matter?" demanded Milena.

"The peasants of our village," replied the man, "and of Mikonloff are struggling with the insurgents down by the café and the little wood. All goes well, however; the scythes are sharp and do their bloody mowing; the heads fall like grain!"

"So!" said Milena; and she aided the peasant woman to place her husband in his bed and to bind his wounds. Then she retraced her steps to tranquilise her father.

An hour later a loud knocking sounded upon the gate of the cemetery.

"See what it is, Milena," said the grave-digger again; and Milena, obeying the command, opened the wicket obstructed by frost, to find before it a row of sledges encompassed by horsemen, the barrels of their muskets and the blades of their sickles sparkling in the rays of the moon.

"Come, open the gate, old mole!" shouted a voice from the crowd; "open the gate, and open quickly. We bring you a score of distinguished guests!"

"But I want no guests," replied Boloski from the interior. "I am ill, as you know well; I dare not go out in a night like this."

"Ill or no," cried the voice again, "the work must be done."

"Well, bury them yourselves, then."

"We cannot—we have no time."

"In that case," said Milena brusquely, shutting the wicket to end the discussion, "tis I who will bury them for you." And she went out to open the gate to the four loaded sledges, bearing the dead bodies of the insurgents, and to the conquerors, armed with their bloody sickles and gleaming scythes.

"Throw them there upon the snow," said she to the

mayor of the village, who greeted her as she appeared with a friendly nod; "I'll start business for you at the rising of the sun."

"No," said the mayor; "that would not be Christian—the wolves and ravens are already waiting to do their work—they must be buried now. You will receive for the job the usual sum in addition to that two quarts of brandy, and, for your back, a new pelisse. Is it a bargain?"

"A bargain," she answered. "I'll begin when you say," and with arms akimbo and robust fists upon her hips, she regarded the defile of peasants and sledges rapidly discharging their score of dead.

Her beautiful face remained impassive; pity seemed a stranger to those hard features, and yet what charm, what passion in those great black eyes, in that sensitive nose, in that firm, severe mouth.

The mayor counted the money into her hand, put the bottle of brandy on the snow beside her, and the sledges slowly drew on again, the peasants following in their wake as silently as they had come.

"But the pelisse?" demanded Milena.

"To-morrow, when the work is done."

And the mayor also quitted the cemetery, and Milena took up her spade, and with a great swallow of brandy commenced to dig the first trench, crooning as she worked, the words of an ancient grave-digger's song.

The sad melody, monotonous and slow as befitted the song of the dead, was accompanied by the dull ringing of the iron upon the frozen ground and the distant howling of the hungry wolves.

Another swallow of brandy, another swing of her muscular arms, and so it went till the trench was done, and Melina, waiting a moment to regain her breath, gazed on the corpses.

"'Twas doubtless you," said she to an old man, with long, white curls, clad in a rich cloak, trimmed with zibeline, and in whose girdle sparkled a superb yataghan, "'twas doubtless you who led the band. Well, this time too, you shall go before!"

And she took him in her arms like a little child, decended into the trench herself and gently laid him on the ground. With the others she was not so ceremonious, an arm, a leg, a shoulder—anything, in short, that helped to lift and toss them to their bed in the ditch, served her purpose.

"But Heaven help me!" she cried, as before her in the snow lay stretched a bleeding trunk, "Heaven help me, if it isn't the lord of Kamiez, that cursed Turk, and oppressor of the poor."

And she struck the face of the head that lay beside the trunk a blow which sent it rolling like a ball to the depths below. Another swallow of brandy, a new body in the hole, then the tomb securely closed, Melina was ready to begin the second.

In the meantime, the moon, rising higher and higher in the heavens, wrapped in its warm light the silent graves, the crucifix, the roofs of the now sleeping village and the vast and soundless plain.

And again the second trench ready, the gravedigger's daughter approached another group of dead. The face of the first one was covered with blood which had ran from a cut in the head. At the same instant she heard a sigh—a long, shuddering breath that came from this body. Melina drew back hastily; courageous as she was, she felt her hair rise upon her head; and soon she saw that rigid body begin to stir.

He still lived, then. There was no longer a doubt of it. She caught him in her arms in order to succour him, rubbing with snow that face begrimed with blood and powder, and chafing his frozen hands. In a moment his eyes unclosed.

"Valerian!" his name upon Milena's lips was half a scream and half a cry of menacing anger.

She shook her head brusquely, thrust him from her, and rose to her feet.

"Save you!" said she with a calm more terrible than either rage or the joy of a glutted vengeance, "when it is God who has delivered you into my hands! You betrayed me—you now belong to me. Pray to your God, Valerian; perhaps He will be merciful, but from me expect no mercy."

"You have forgotten, then, Milena, forgotten how I loved you!"

"No, I have forgotten nothing; but you, what have you done with all those vows? You, who ruined me—who then, in spite of everything, left me for another! I shall not spare you—be sure of that!"

"You will not kill me?" groaned the unhappy one.

"Kill you? No!"

She smiled with a glacial irony which made him shudder.

"I shall only do my duty—I shall bury you as I have received orders!"

"Bury me!" cried Valerian. "Bury me, living?"

"Why not?" responded Milena, with a burst of cruel laughter. "I must earn the sheepskin for my back which the mayor promised me!"

"Have pity, Milena; for Heaven's sake, have pity!"

"Did you have pity upon me?" she answered sternly. "You, who have vowed me to sorrow and to shame. This for your beautiful love—behold it."

And she seized him by the shoulders and sought to thrust him in; but he, with that frightful death before him, had risen to his feet, and a furious struggle began between them,—a hopeless struggle too, for soon Valerian renounced all thought of wresting himself from the embrace of this savage creature. From the loss of blood his strength was gone from him—he was but a child in her cruel hands.

"Mercy, Milena, I beseech you—mercy!"

She responded with a disdainful foot-thrust which sent him rolling into the gaping hole. A last time he struggled to his feet, his arms outstretched and clasping her knees with supplicating gesture.

But his prayers only rendered her more ferocious still. She caught up her spade and struck his hands—their grasp relaxed, she struck again, a second, a third blow—he fell!

And Melina?

Milena, with one hand clenched upon her spade, the other doubled upon her hip, stood there and heard him groaning—stood there and contemplated him with cold, fierce eyes and voluptuous pleasure.

"Now," said she, "now, Valerian, are you mine?"

Then she began to crumble the earth between her fingers and to fill the ditch, to fill it in and stamp it down, as she had filled and stamped the first, her voice firm and clear as ever, rising always in the chorus of her sinister song, and always accompanied by the sound of the clods falling one upon the other by the ring of the spade, by the cawing crows circling hungrily above the heap of the unburied dead. And, in the east, the first grey lights of the coming morning slowly spread themselves across the heavens, pale and cold as the smile upon the faces of the frozen clay.

Sacher Masoch.

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With Her Own Weapons.

MARION meant to be sympathetic, after the manner of men, by uttering philosophical platitudes as a balm for sentimental heart troubles; but he quickly realised that the case before him was too genuine and severe to be cured by such superficial ointment as cynical quotations from Kipling. So he took another tack.

"Of course, old man, there are women and women. Some can be had for the asking, while others play for all the line they can get. It's just like fishing"—his metaphor suggesting an illustration from sport—"one fish will bite at almost anything; but another insists on a nice fly for an attraction, and, even after you've got it really hooked, you've got to play it until your patience is almost gone.

"Now, you'd rather have a girl with some spirit—one who'd stand you off for a time—than one who was all the time throwing herself at your head, wouldn't you?"

Warren vouchsafed a weak, doubtful "Yes."

"By-the-way, have you asked her?"

"No. That's the difficulty. I don't really get a chance. Just as I get myself spurred up to the mark some confounded interruption interferes, or she turns it off with some remark or other."

"You think the girl really cares for you?" asked Marion, dropping his raillery and becoming serious.

"I think she does," frankly answered Warren, "although sometimes I feel as if I didn't know whether she did or not," he continued, somewhat dubiously.

"Well, there's only one way to find out," remarked Marion, "and that is to—here, I have a plan," breaking abruptly into his sentence. "I have a plan," he slowly repeated, "and I believe it will work if you follow my advice. Put yourself in my hands," he continued, his face brightening, as his plan was unfolded to his mind, "and I'll bet that you'll win."

Then he buttonholed Warren, pulled him into a corner, and addressed him in a low, earnest tone, interspersing his remarks with emphatic gestures. When he had finished, Warren still looked dubious, but somewhat more hopeful.

* * * * *

"Good evening, Mr. Warren. I'm so glad to see you. We're just packing up—getting ready to go to the country."

"Indeed! Lovely weather. Hope you'll have a pleasant time." But he might have been a phonograph, or a Punch-and-Judy operator, for all the expression he put into his words.

"Oh! I've no doubt we shall," she answered, with a toss of her head. "There's so much going on there, and so many interesting people to meet," she continued, with a bored air, as if her immediate surroundings were productive of nothing but *ennui*.

"Yes," he assented, in a listless monotone, which might mean anything or nothing.

She pretended not to notice his abstracted manner and rattled on:

"My friends write me there are ever so many nice people there, and with golf and driving and boating, there'll be no end of fun."

"Yes."

Again that tone of polite indifference.

"Well, I'm going for a trip myself," he added, rousing himself from his lethargy, and almost blurting out his words.

"Indeed! Where?"

This was her turn.

"To Hong Kong."

"To Hong Kong?"

This time she was interested in spite of herself. She repeated his answer with distinct emphasis on the words, and a rising inflection at the end.

"Oh, come now, you're joking. Your——"

"No, really," he asserted; "there's an opening there in our firm. They want a young man to take charge of their branch banking house there, and I can have the place. It looks like a good opening, and I thought I'd take it. Of course, it means"—clearing his throat—"tearing one's self away from one's friends, but then, I shall probably not be greatly missed."

"Oh, Mr. Warren," broke in the girl reproachfully.

The coquettish manner was gone. The genuine woman was speaking.

"Well, for a day or two a few may notice my absence, and then——"

He finished the sentence with a careless wave of his hand, to denote the ephemeral nature of the friendship he conceived was felt for him.

"But there are no nice girls there," she remarked mischievously.

She was trying to get back to the coquette again, but her eyes were moist.

"That isn't a consideration," he answered gloomily. "There's only one girl in this world for whose smile I'd give the hopes I entertain for my business future, and I'm afraid that in her eyes I'm but as all the rest of the world."

"Who is the young lady, may I ask; do I know her?" she queried with an attempt at gaiety.

Warren glanced at her, but she wasn't looking at him. She seemed to be manifesting an extraordinary interest in picking at the end of a ribbon on her dress.

* * * * * *

"I have just been reading the social gossip," wrote Marion, who had gone north for a month on business, "and I congratulate you. But why in the name of all that's absurd did you hesitate so long? The game must have been in your hands from the first. One of these fine days you will want a crest. How would this suggestion meet your approval: 'A bold bluff painted on a field of blue?'"

And he underscored two words in the last sentence.

RALPH HENWOOD.

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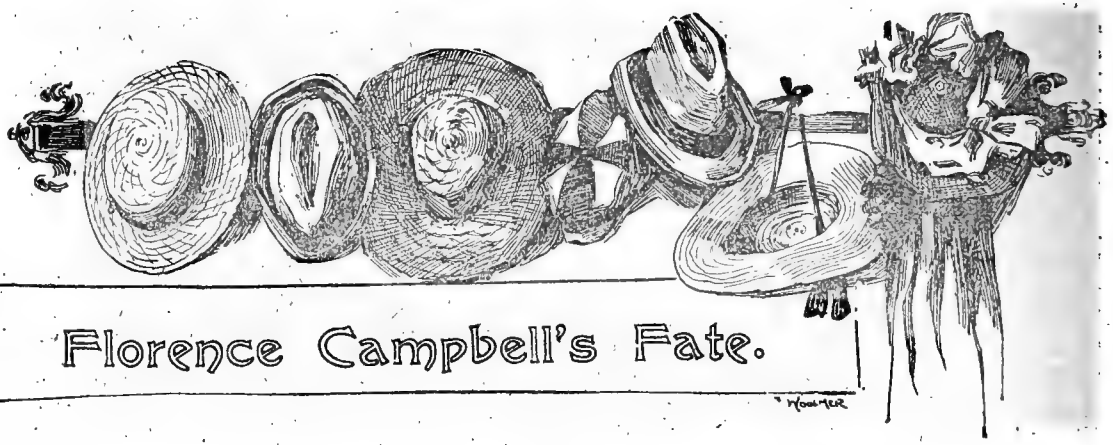

Florence Campbell's Fate.

I AM, as you know, not a young man, and in the practice of my profession I have learned to diagnose the cases that come under my care very slowly and by degrees. Every year has taught me that physical symptoms are often the result of mental ailments, and that, while cordials and powders are sometimes very useful aids, the first and all important thing is to understand fully the true history of the patient.

Now when I was first called to see Florence Campbell the message conveyed to me threw no light on the case, beyond what the most ordinary observer would have detected at a glance. The note read thus:

DR. H. HAMILTON.

DEAR SIR,—Although I have been here for several months, it is the first time since I came that I have myself felt that I needed medical attention. I have, therefore, not sent you the inclosed note (the history of which you no doubt know) until now. If you will read it, it will explain that the time has now come when, if you will come to me, I need your care.—Yours respectfully,

FLORENCE CAMPBELL.

The note inclosed was from a physician in Manchester whom I had known intimately many years before, but with whom I had held no communication for a long time past. It said:

MY DEAR DOCTOR,—One of my patients is about to visit London. The length of her stay is uncertain, and, as she is often ailing, she has asked me to give her a note to one whom I believe to be skilful, and to possess the qualities which she requires in a physician. In thinking over the list of those known to me in London, I have decided to give her this note to you. She is one of those rare patients to whom you can afford to tell the unvarnished truth, and from whom you can expect it. She has had no serious illness recently, but is rather subject to slight colds and sick headache. I give her sulph. 12. She always responds to that in time.—Yours, as ever, THOMAS C. GRISWOLD.

I do not know that I ever entered a more delicately perfumed room than the one in which Florence Campbell sat.

She rose from her deep armchair as I entered, and extending her hand, grasped mine with a vigour unusual in a woman, even when she is well.

"This is Doctor Hamilton?" she said in a clear voice; "I am very glad to see you, Doctor. I am Florence Campbell. You received a note from your friend, Dr. Griswold, telling how I came into possession of it."

Direct of speech, clear of voice, hand feverish, but firm in grasp, I commented mentally as she spoke. This was not what I expected.

She stood with her back to the light, very erect and well poised.

"Come to the window," I said. "Does your head ache?"

She laughed.

"Oh, I don't know that it does—not particulary, I fancy there is not much inside of it to ache much. Mere bone and vacuity could not do a great deal in that line, could it, Doctor?"

Then she laughed again. She looked me in the eyes, and I fancy she was diagnosing me.

She was evidently trying to gain time—to take my measure.

"It is always rather a trying thing to get a new doctor, don't you think so?" she asked, with another little laugh. "I always feel so foolish to think I have called him for so trifling a matter as my ailments are. I cannot expect you to furnish me with robust ancestors, can I? Just keep me out of bed,"—and here, for the first time, I noticed a slight tremor in her voice—"just keep me so that I can read, and—so that I shall not need to sit alone, and I think I shall be quite satisfied—quite!"

She had turned her face away as she said the last; but I saw that she was having a hard struggle to keep back the tears, notwithstanding the little laugh that followed.

I had felt her pulse; it was hardly perceptible, and fluttered rather than beat, and I had watched her closely as she spoke; but whenever she came near the verge of showing deeper than the surface, she broke in with that non-committal little laugh, or turned her face, or half closed her great eyes, and I was foiled. Her pulse and the faint blue veins told me one story; she tried to tell me quite another.

"How are you suffering to-day?" I asked.

She looked steadily at me a moment, then lowering her eyes, raised her left hand, looked at its palm a moment, held her lips tightly closed, and then with a sudden glance at me, as if on the defensive, said:

"I hardly know; I am only a little under the influence of the weather; I am weak. I am losing my—hold—on myself—on my—nerves. I cannot afford to do that."

The last was said with more emotion than she cared to display. So she arose, walked swiftly to the dressing-case, took up a lace handkerchief, and returned to a chair which stood in the shadow, and then, with a merry little peal of laughter, said:

"Well, I don't wonder, Doctor, that you are unable to

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diagnose that case. It would require a barometer to do that, I fancy, from the amount of weather I got into it. But really, now, how am I to know what is the matter with me? That is for you to say; I am not the doctor. I suppose it is malaria, don't you?"

I wanted to gain time—to study her a little. I saw that she was or had been, really ill; ill, that is, in mind, if not in body. I fancied that she succeeded in deceiving Griswold into treating her for some physical trouble which she did not have, or, if she had it, only as a result of a much graver malady.

The right branch may have been found and nipped off from time to time when it grew uncomfortably long; but the root, I believed, had not been touched, and, I thought, had not been even suspected by her former physician.

I believed that Griswold had not fully understood his former patient. "Sulph. 12" indeed! Then I smiled, and said aloud:

"Dr. Griswold writes me that in such cases as yours he advises sulph. 12—that it has given relief. Do you call yourself a sulphur patient?"

I watched her narrowly, and, if she did not smile in a satirical way, I was deceived.

"Are you out of that remedy? and do you want more of it?" I asked, with a serious face.

She did not reply at once. There seemed to be a struggle in her mind as to how she would let me know. Then she looked at me attentively for a moment, with a puzzled expression I thought; then an unutterably weary look crossed her face. She said slowly and deliberately:

"I have no doubt sulphur will do as well as anything else. Oh, yes! I am decidedly a sulphur patient, no doubt. I suppose I have taken several pints of that remedy in my time. A number of physicians have given it to me from time to time."

How far would she go, and how far would she let me go, with this nonsense? I looked gravely into her eyes, and said, "That remedy will do. It sometimes holds a patient until a doctor can decide exactly which complaint is to be treated. In your case I am inclined to suspect the—that it is—the heart. I shall, therefore, begin by asking you to be good enough to tell me what it is that affects your heart."

I had taken her wrist in my hand as I began to speak. My finger was on her pulse. It gave a great bound, and then beat rapidly; and although her face grew a shade paler and her eyes wavered as they tried to look into mine, I knew that I had both surprised and impressed her.

She recovered herself instantly, and made up her mind to hedge still further.

"If there is anything the matter with my heart, you are the first to suspect it. My father, however, died of heart disease, and I have always hoped that I should die as suddenly. But I shall not—I shall not! I am so wiry, so all-enduring! I recover! I always recover!"

She said this passionately, and as if it were a grave misfortune—as if she were very old. I pretended to take it humourously.

"Perhaps at your advanced age your father might have said the same."

She laughed. She saw a loop-hole, and immediately took it.

"Oh, you think I am very young, Doctor, but I am not. People always think me younger than I am—at first. I look older when you get used to me. I am nearly thirty."

I was surprised. I had taken her to be about twenty-three.

"In years, or in experience? Which way do you count your age?"

She got up suddenly again and walked to the dressing-case, then to the window. In doing so she raised her hand to her eyes. It was the hand with the lace handkerchief in it.

"Experience!" she exclaimed, and then, checking herself: "No, people never think me so old—not at first," she said, returning to her chair. "But I suppose I am not too old to be cured with sulph. 12, am I?"

"Miss Campbell," I said, stepping quickly up to her side, and surprising her, "you do not need sulphur. You need to be relieved of this strain on your nerves. Make up your mind to tell me your history to-morrow morning—to tell it all; I do not want some fairy tales. Until then, take these drops to quiet your nerves."

There were tears in her eyes. She did not attempt to hide them. They ran down her cheeks, and she simply closed the lids, and let them flow. I took her lace handkerchief, and wiped her cheeks. Then I dropped it in her lap, placed the phial on her stand, took up my hat, and left.

* * * * *

But I did not get her story the next day, nor the next, nor the next again.

Her tact was perfectly mystifying in its intricacy; her power of evasion marvellous, and her study of me amusing.

One morning she made a remark that seemed to show that she feared to die. I seized the opportunity, for I thought by a little adroitness I might get at least a part of the truth.

"So you are really afraid to die, and yet think that you must," I said bluntly.

She turned her great luminous eyes on me, and her lip curled slightly with real scorn before she forced upon her face her usual remark of good-humoured sarcasm.

"Afraid!" she exclaimed; "afraid to die! Afraid of what, pray? I cannot imagine being afraid to die. It is life I am afraid of. If I could only——"

She checked herself abruptly, and with an evident effort resumed her light air and tone.

"Ah, my child," said I, taking her hand, which was almost as cold and white as marble, "and there are Doctors deceived, and confiding persons who prescribe 'sulph 12' for the broken heart and over-wrought nerves of a little woman who tries bravely to fly her gay colours in the face of defeat and to whistle a tune at a grave."

I had called late, and we were sitting in the twilight, but I saw tears fall on her lap, and she did not withdraw her hand, which trembled violently.

I had touched the wound roughly, as I had determined to do; but, old man as I was, and used to the sight of suffering as I had been for years, I could restrain myself only by an effort from taking her in my arms and asking her to forget what I said. She seemed so utterly shaken. We sat for some moments in perfect silence, except for her quick, smothered little sobs, and then she said, passionately:

"Oh, Heaven, Doctor, how did you know?" And then, with a flash of fear in her voice, "Who told you?"

"I know nothing except what I have seen of your brave fight, my child. All the information I have had about you, from outside, was contained in that little note of introduction from Griswold.

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"I have not watched you for nothing; and I never treat a patient without first diagnosing his case. I do not say that I am always right, but I am, at least, not blind, and I have always been interested in you. I should like to help you, if you will let me. I can do nothing for you in the dark." Then dropping my voice significantly:

"Does he know where you are? Does he know you are ill?"

There was a long silence. I did not know but that she was offended. She was struggling for command of her voice, and for courage. Presently she said, in a hoarse whisper, which evidently shocked her as much as it startled me, so unnatural did it sound:

"Who? My husband?"

"Your husband!" I exclaimed. "Are you—is there—I did not know you were married. Why did you always allow me to call you Miss Campbell?"

"I do not know," she said wearily. "It makes no difference to me, and it seemed to please your fancy to treat me as a child. But I really never noticed that you did always call me Miss. If I had I should not have cared. What difference could it make to me—or to you—what prefix you put to my name?"

"But I did not know that you were married," I said almost sharply.

She looked up startled for a moment; but recovering in an instant she said, smiling a little, and, with evident relief, plunging into a new opening:

"That had nothing to do with my case. There was no need to discuss family relations. I never thought of whether you were married or not. You were my doctor—I your patient. It would not be—edifying to talk about my affairs."

"You are tired out," I said, rising. I judged it prudent to go. "Go to bed now. Order your tea brought up. Here is an order to see to anything you may ask promptly. Beesley, the proprietor, is an old friend of mine. Any order you may give, if you send it down with this note from me, will be obeyed at once. I will come to-morrow. Good-night."

I put the order on the table at her side. I know my voice was husky; it startled me as I heard it. She sat perfectly still; but she laid her other hand on top of mine with a light pressure, and her voice sounded tired and full of tears.

"Good-night. You are very kind—very thoughtful. I will be brave to-morrow. Good-night."

That night I drove past and saw a light in her window at one o'clock.

"Poor child!" I said, "will she be brave enough to tell me to-morrow, or will she die with her burden, and her gay little laugh on her lips?"

* * * * *

The next day I called earlier than usual. I had spent an almost sleepless night, wondering what I could do for this beautiful, lovable woman, who seemed to be all alone in the world, and who evidently felt that she must remain apart and desolate.

What had caused her to leave her husband? Or had he left her? What for? What kind of man was he? Did she love him, and was she breaking her heart for him? Or did he stand between her and some other love? Had she married young, and made a mistake that was eating her life out? How could I help her?

As I stepped into the hotel office to send up my card, as was my custom, the manager escorted me with his perfunctory smile and said:

"Good morning, Doctor. Got so in the habit o' coming here lately, s'pose it'll take quite a while to leave it off. Eh?"

I stared at the man in utter bewilderment.

"Ha! ha! ha! I believe you'd forgot already she'd gone." And then, with a quick flash of surprise and intelligent, detective shrewdness, "You knew she was going, doctor? She did not let you in for her little bill, did she? Of course not. Her husband was in such a dickens of a hurry to catch the early train, they said he was ringing his bell the blessed night for fear they'd lose it. You hadn't gone five minutes last night, when he came down here with your cheque and order, and we had to make things lively to get cash enough together to meet it for her; but we made it, and so they got off all right."

"Have you got my cheque here yet?" asked I, in a tone that arrested the attention of the manager, who looked up in surprise.

"Good Heavens, no! Do you think we're made of ready money, just because you are? That cheque was in the bank the first thing after banking hours," said he. "You see, it cleaned us out last night. I told Campbell last night that you must think hotels were queer to expect us to cash a five hundred pound cheque at five minutes notice. Couldn't 'a done it at all if 't hadn't been pay-night for the servants and the rest of us. We all had to wait till to-day. But Mr. Beesley will tell you. Here he comes."

"Why, Doctor, old boy," said Beesley, coming up from behind and clapping me vigorously on the shoulder, "didn't expect to see the light of your countenance here again so soon. Thought we owed it all to your professional ardour for that charming patient of your's up in number 13. They got off all right, but if any other man but you had sent that order and cheque down here for us to cash last night I wouldn't have cashed it. Of course, I understood that they were called away suddenly, unexpectedly, and all that. He told me all about it, and that you did not complete the bargain until the last minute; but——"

"Bargain?" gasped I, in spite of my determination to hear all before disclosing anything.

"Oh, it was all right, my boy, as long as it was you—glad to do you a good turn any day. But what a queer idea for that little woman to marry such a man! How did it happen? I'd like to know the history. Every time I saw him come I made up my mind to ask you about them, and then I always forgot it when I saw you. He told me you had been his wife's guardian!"

I left the hotel abruptly, my brain in a whirl; I could not see through this maze. My name had been forged on a cheque, and I had in some way been duped, that was all I could grasp.

But not duped by her—no, no, I would never believe that. It was by this man who called himself her husband.

Later, when calmer, I tried to thrash it all out, but all I could do was to lay the blame on someone else, not upon her, whom I loved—yes, that was the truth; old man that I was, I had fallen in love with her.

Then I resolved to make inquiries, even though I hated myself for so doing.

How about Griswold's introduction — and that "sulph. 12." I looked through my desk for Griswold's note. It was certainly his handwriting; but I noticed for the first time that it did not mention her name.

Perhaps this was a loophole through which I might bring my fair patient—in whom I was beginning to fear I had taken too deep an interest—without discredit to herself.

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Might she not have changed her name since Griswold treated her? I determined to give her the benefit of this doubt until I could be sure that it had no foundation.

I felt relieved by this respite, and heartily ashamed of the unjust suspicion of the moment before, I gave no hint of it in the letter I now wrote Griswold describing the lady, and in which I inclosed his letter of introduction to me.

The next few days I went about my practice in a dream, and it was no doubt due to fortuitous circumstances rather than to my skill that several of my patients still live to tell the tale of their suffering, and of my phenomenal ability to cope with disease in all its malignant power.

In due time Griswold's letter came. I went into my room to read it. I remember thinking vaguely that I usually took time to open my letters with more precision and with less disregard for the untidy appearance of their outing covering afterwards. I hesitated to read beyond the first line, although I had so hastened to get that far. I read: "My dear old friend," and then turned the letter over to see how long it was—how much probable information it contained. There were four closely-written pages.

"I never heard of anyone of the name of Florence Campbell, so far as I can recall. I certainly never had a patient by that name. Some months ago I gave the letter you enclose—which I certainly did write—to a patient of mine who was on her way to the Cape, and expected to stay some time in London on her way.

"She, however, was in no way like the lady you describe. Her name was Hatfield, and she was small, with dreamy blue eyes and flaxen hair. I understood that she did not stop but a few days in London. I have since learned from her brother that she made the acquaintance of a man whose name was Campbell—a man with a decidedly vague, not to say hazy, reputation; and that his wife, who was supposed to be an invalid, never appeared in public, and so was never seen by Hatfield, but was only known to him through Kitty's enraptured eyes. She was said to be bright and pretty. Miss Hatfield is the most generous child alive in her estimate of other women. However, he thinks it possible that she either gave her the letter from me to you and asked her to have proper medical care, or else that the woman or her husband got hold of it in a less legitimate way, which I think quite likely. Miss Hatfield thought that Mrs. Campbell was charming.

"Hatfield is so ashamed of his sister's friendship for the woman that I had the utmost difficulty in making him tell me the whole truth; but, from what I gathered yesterday, he thinks them most likely the head of a gang of counterfeiters or forgers, and——"

I read no further, or, if I did, I can recall only that. It was burned into my brain, and when a loud pounding on my door aroused me, I found the letter twisted and torn into a thousand pieces, the Vichy and wine bottles at my side half-empty, and the hands of the clock pointing to half-past ten.

"Doctor! Doctor!" called my man, "oh, Doctor! Oh, dear! I'm afraid something's wrong with the Doctor, but I'm afraid to break in the door."

I went to the door to prevent a scene. One of my best patients stood there, with Morgan, the man. Both of them were pale and full of suppressed excitement.

"Heavens and earth, Doctor, we were afraid you were dead! What is the matter?" said my patient.

"Tired out; went to sleep," said I; but I did not know my own voice as I spoke. It sounded distant, and its tones were strange.

They both looked at me suspiciously, and with evident anxiety as to my mental condition. I caught at the means of escape.

"I am too tired to see anyone to-night. In fact, I am not well. You will have to let me off this time. Get Dr. Talbott, lower down, if anyone is ill; I am going to bed. Good-night!"

It was two months later ere I heard the truth, and that was when called upon to make a post-mortem examination of the body of a woman found murdered. It was Florence Campbell!

The body was identified by Miss Kate Hatfield, and afterwards I obtained particulars from her.

It was part of the scheme that Mrs. Campbell should be an "invalid," but the husband and wife were professional swindlers. They were kind to Miss Hatfield on purpose, and she was deceived by them and gave up the letter to them. She did not know at the time that they intended to rob me, but she heard it after they left the hotel.

She was so ashamed and afraid that she dare not go back to Manchester or write, and in her weak-minded state she had remained with them.

Who murdered Florence Campbell?

There was not enough evidence to show, but we all had our suspicions.

RALPH WINDSOR.

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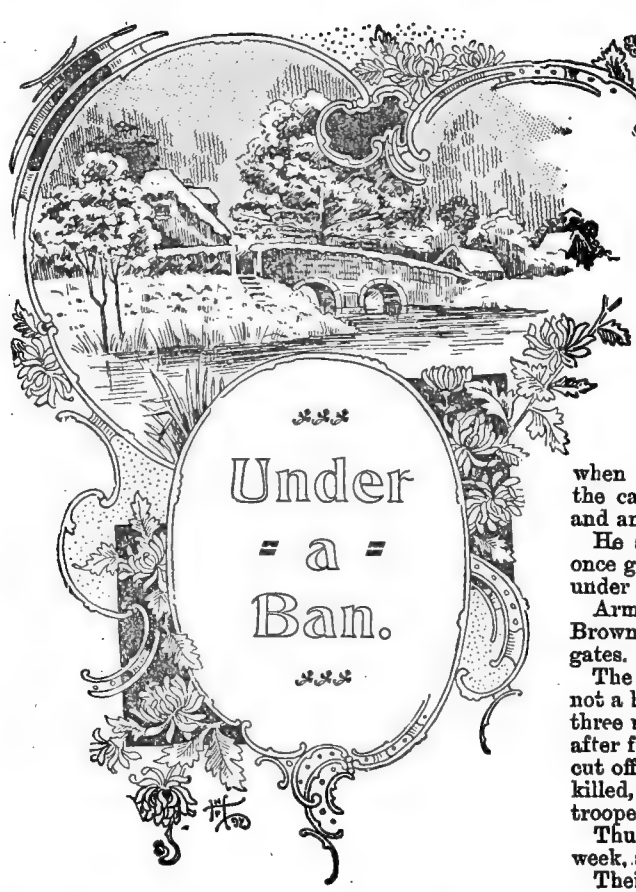

THE story of the spell that hung over B troop is not known to the outside world, nor does the public know that the troops of the 95th were re-named, and that A troop was called D troop, and so on. This is the story of the ban.

There was a time when the troop was high in favour, and officers liked to be drafted to it. Then its ill-luck began. It was sent to the frontier, and disaster after disaster overtook it.

It marched against some hillmen, and somehow—no one knew—it fell into ambush and lost forty men at one sweep. The troop was forced to retire, and disgrace clung to it.

After that, it was kept at a little frontier post at its reduced strength, but its ill-luck continued. Men died apparently while in good health, and three committed suicide at different times. If a party went out for any purpose, it was almost certain to lose at least one man, and yet it never really had an actual fight.

Its reputation became known to army men, and officers used their influence to avoid being drafted to that ill-fated troop. The authorities seemed impressed with the fact that a ban was upon the troop; at any rate, the number was not made up after a while.

Finally the number dwindled to thirty-seven, and it was at that point in its misfortunes that it was sent to Fort Brown, for no other apparent reason than to get rid of it—for there was no need to reinforce the infantry stationed at that solitary fort.

Fort Brown was far away on the north-west frontier of India. It had been erected because it might be useful, and was named after the officer who built it—some said also because the sun made everything brown and parched out there. It was an unenviable post.

The troop was then under the command of a young lieutenant, who had but just joined it. He had not been in it a week when the captain died, so he had to take charge, and the captain's place had not been filled. He was eager and ambitious, but soon he learnt about the ban.

He saw the dispirited look of the remnant of the once gallant troop; he was made to realise that he was under a ban, as it were, but he was not disheartened.

Army records will tell you what happened at Fort Brown within a week after B troop rode through the gates.

The infantry had been there for three months, but not a hostile tribesman had been seen. A corporal and three men, with a cart and driver, were sent to the hills after fuel, when they fell into an ambuscade and were cut off. The four troopers were mounted, yet all were killed, while the driver made a safe escape on foot. A trooper hung himself in the barracks that night.

Thus five more men were wiped off the rolls within a week, and the troop reduced to thirty-two.

Their fate was clinging to them; there was no escape from it.

The colonel at Fort Brown had received the young officer half in welcome, half in pity. He knew the history of B troop, and he realised that any connection with it must cast a shadow on the career of an officer.

The loss of the five men gave the colonel anxious thought. No one could be held to blame. It was simply one of the fatalities which had so persistently pursued the troop.

One day he received news which determined him to take a certain step, and he sent for the young lieutenant and said:

"A friendly native is in with the information that a band of hostiles is making for Brown's Valley. That is where the friendlies who came along two weeks ago were going to settle. I fear they will be unprepared for an attack and will all be massacred."

"And you will send B troop out to drive the enemy off?" eagerly exclaimed the lieutenant.

"If you could reach Amghir post, twenty miles away, before the hostiles, you might turn them back. If they get ahead of you——"

"I would push on after them and hope to save the friendlies. I can be ready in half an hour."

The colonel was a man of forty-five, the lieutenant not yet twenty-three. The older officer looked out of the open window, and thought of the long ride—the fight which must surely take place. Then he looked at the boy and wondered if it would be the last of B troop or the turn of its luck.

He was both a soldier and a man. As a soldier he desired to give a soldier a chance. As a man he feared to send out a boy like that where it needed an experienced head.

"You know the spell that is upon us," whispered the lieutenant. "The troop is slowly but surely being cleared off the face of the earth. The men are objects of pity and sympathy and have almost become children. Let me go. I will either win a victory or it will be the last of the troop."

The spirit of the old soldier was stirred. He had given many a young soldier opportunity to distinguish himself, and but for the spell he would not have hesitated in this case. Dispirited men, an officer who had never tackled these tribesmen, and the demon of ill-luck, which had walked at a company's heels like a ghost—no wonder he hesitated. He shook his head and decided that the scout must ride hard and fast, but ride alone, and warn the natives of their danger.

"I beg of you—we all beg of you!" pleaded the lieutenant. "Cavalry is needed to head those fellows off. If the friendlies are killed it will be said that you thought us cowards, and were afraid to order us out."

"There will be thirty-two of you and one hundred of the enemy," said the colonel.

"But we will turn them back, sir; we will fight them!"

"And if they are too many for you?"

"I know the history of the troop, sir," said the boy in trembling tones. "It has lost almost seventy men by desertion, suicide, and skirmish. It has not lost a man in a real fight. They shall say of it in the next three days that it has won a fight or been wiped out. I would rather be lying dead there than continue to serve in a troop which has such a record!"

"You may go," said the colonel. "If it is a mistake, then Heaven help me! Turn those tribesmen back, and I will recommend you for promotion. If they are too many for you——"

"Then you will know it by the fact that we do not return."

Half-an-hour later the men of B troop rode out of Fort Brown and made for the pass.

"There goes the last of B troop," muttered every soldier left behind as the troopers rode away, and as they said it they instinctively looked up at the flag as if expecting to see it at half-mast.

The troopers had received that order without enthusiasm. They knew they were to make a hard ride and that a fight was probable, but they were neither exultant nor despondent. Like the Arabs, they shrugged their shoulders and said, "Kismet."

They were in the hands of fate, and fate was likely to be against them. With scarcely a farewell, and with never a look over their shoulders, they rode away, two by two, and it was not until long after dark that the officer at the head drew rein and ordered the camp for the night. Before they slept he said to them:

"We shall be up and away at the first signs of daylight. Men, listen to me. We are riding to reach the pass ahead of a war party of one hundred. We shall get there first and beat them back or die fighting. I have promised the colonel this. You have had one disaster after another until your fellow soldiers sneer and pity and wonder if cowardice is not at the bottom of it. I do not believe it is. I believe every man of you to be game, and we will win a victory which shall place the old troop in the front!"

A cheer burst from every man—the first cheering heard in Troop B for many a day. Each man drew himself up more proudly. Their minds worked even as they slept, and when daylight came the officer looked from face to face and wondered at the change. There was an eagerness to make him glad and proud.

Breaking camp as soon as it was light enough to see, the troop rode at a gallop, and reached the gap ahead of the hostiles.

Only a short hour, though. Their horses had not yet ceased blowing when the advance of the enemy was made out.

Their destination was a narrow road through a mountain, and its southern end debouched into Brown's Valley, five miles away. The young officer knew nothing of war; but common sense and his veteran sergeant suggested a breastwork across the entrance to the pass.

One was constructed of rocks and logs and stones, and it was hardly finished before the skirmishers of the war party were firing upon it.

No man will ever read what is called "Cunningham's Defence" without his pulse quickening. One hundred and twenty tribesmen pressed forward against a force of thirty-two troopers. Three different times the enemy charged right up to the breastwork, but each time were beaten back with slaughter. The defenders did not escape death however. When the last charge was driven back, eight of them were stretched out on the rock soil, and there were but twenty-four to fall back for a mile and build another breastwork.

This move was necessitated by the enemy working up the sides of the mountain, and securing a flank fire.

The second breastwork was evacuated the next morning for the same reason, and a mile in the rear of it another was built. When this had to be abandoned, only ten men were left alive.

When flanked out of their fourth defence, there were only five men. One of these was sent to the valley for help, but was cut off.

Of the other four, of whom the officer was one, they died at the fifth breastwork—died with carbines in their hands after firing their last cartridges, and died with cheers of defiance on their lips.

Of the war party sixty-two were killed or wounded, and it turned back.

One day a B trooper was seen coming on foot across the plain. He lurched and staggered as he walked. Soldiers ran to meet him and assist him into the fort. He had been without food or water for two days. The colonel looked at him for a long time without speaking. Then, with pale face and trembling lips, he asked:

"Lanigan, where is your officer—the troop?"

And Lanigan straightened up, saluted, and in a voice as hoarse as a raven's cry he replied:

"I have to report, sir, that B troop has been annihilated to a man, and Heaven forgive me, but I'm that man! They are dead in the pass—all dead—all dead! I was left for dead, but was only unconscious."

Sybil Sedgwick.

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BOOK III.—CONCERNING THE RULE OF KING OLERON.

CHAPTER I.

How the three became convalescent: how they distrusted the chief sorcerer: and how they discussed their future prospects.

"'THE ups and downs of outrageous fortune,'" quoted Sneyd, who was lying in a grass hammock, slung beneath two feathery-topped palm-trees. A cool, fragrant breeze blew from an orange grove close at his right hand. From the other side came up the gentle tinkle tinkle of a streamlet crossing over a bed of shingle on its way to the sea. Overhead, birds kept up a ceaseless melody. Scarlet dragon-flies and gorgeous butterflies winged hither and thither close before his eyes.

O'Neill was in another hammock close by. He was lying with one arm under his head, smoking placidly. At Sneyd's remark he withdrew the pipe, and turned his face so as to bring him into view.

"'Tis an up of fortune this, yer honour, I'm thinkin'. Now that y'are gettin' into a state of convalescence, I don't mind tellin' yez that when we got yez ashore, Sandy Sawbones here thought yez was goin' to slip yer cable for good. Ye were all wrinkles and bones. A hungry musquitty couldn't have made a male off yez, and there's plenty o' them pests here to try."

"You and Sandy saved my life. I don't forget it."

"Sorra bit o' savin' did either of us, yer honour. Where'd we ha' been if it wasn't for Mytto and his father Maantee? Stowed away in a shark-fish's belly, or else an albatross's. An' where'd we ha' been if it wasn't for King Oleron? Fattened till we was fit, an' then shoved into some o' these nay ur's insides, as the prastes wanted when we were landed."

"You never told me of that last," said Sneyd.

"No, yez didn't hear for yourself, and Sandy bade me howld me whisht. It was touch an' go wid yer honour just then, any way, an' a plazin' little surprise like that moight ha' made it 'go.' It was meself that was wonderin' whether I'd be cooked wid cabbage or onions, or just eat plain wid spuds and a thrifle of salt. Wid yer honour, there was no doubt. There wasn't mate enough on yez for a sthew. They'd either have had to bile yez down for soup, or else ha' served yez up for supper as grilled bones."

"Ugh! O'Neill, don't be a beast. Tell me, though, is this really so?"

"Sorra lie about it, yer honour. It's the naked savage truth I'm tellin' yez. Ax Sandy av there was any mistake in that blear-eyed praste's meaning'."

"I'm afraid it was clear enough," Sandy admitted. "I guessed it at the time, and Mytto has said since that there was no mistake about it. He comes to teach me his lingo. It's pretty easy. I can make out most things he says now. We eke out with signs when we can't understand one another without."

"And what did he say about our being eaten?"

"Just this, Sir——"

"Half a minute," exclaimed Sneyd, sitting up in his hammock. "If you or O'Neill address me as 'Sir,' or by any title of that sort again, whilst we are on this island, I shall be seriously angry. Whilst we were on board ship, it jarred upon me; but O'Neill there said discipline demanded it. But here we are on a level footing, although so far I am showing myself the worst man of the three."

"But, yer honour——" began the Irishman.

"Mister Murtagh O'Niell," said Sneyd, laughing, "if you stick to that game, I promise you I'll Mister you on every possible occasion, and touch my hat when you speak to me. So you've fair warning. Come, Sandy, what was this about our being eaten?"

"Mytto said the sorcerers—they aren't priests exactly—the sorcerers decided on it the moment we came ashore; but the King, who has his headquarters at the next village——"

"Palace, ye spalpeen!"

"All right, O'Neill, palace if it pleases you. Well, the King said that there was an ancient prophecy which foretold that white men should come and help against the Dajians, who, it seems, are enemies of this tribe, and live on another island close by. The sorcerers pretended that they hadn't forgotten the prophecy, but said that we weren't white. We were brown—and they pointed to our faces. The King noticed this, and seemed doubtful; but when Maantee—Mytto's father, that is—pulled back our clothes, and showed that there was white skin where the sun hadn't darkened it, then the King said we should be saved. The old prophecy might have been partly forgotten. The men who were to come might be partly white; in which case we, being brown and white, would fit in with it. I tried to explain to Mytto," Sandy continued, with a dry chuckle, "that our normal tint was white, and that if we were shut up out of the sunlight, we should become the colour of that blinding beach down there, and he was polite enough not to contradict. But, for all that, I'm afraid he didn't believe me."

"We are all of us rather sunburned, an' that's a fact,"

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remarked O'Neill, critically observing his huge red fist, and then, rolling up his sleeve, and comparing it with the hairy, muscular arm above; "but av we stay hard, at work doin' nothing, under these trees, as we have been since we came ashore, it's white as maley potatoes we'll all be, before the month's out. It's meself that's feelin' paler already."

As the Irishmen's face was still a fiery, brick-red, this may be taken as a figure of speech. But the trio of them certainly had been but little in the sun since they landed. The hut assigned to them was cool and shady, and the little cleared space outside it was sheltered by feathery palm frons, which filtered through nothing brighter than a dim twilight. The natives supplied their every food want—the acmé of hospitality in a primitive community, where food is the greatest necessity of life—and they wisely decided to remain quietly where they were till each was thoroughly recruited. The nervous shock, and the physical prostration due to that desperate spell of hunger and thirst, were not to be got over in a matter of hours. Even Sandy Carmichael, who had been the last to succumb to his privations, was very far from being his former self again, even after the lapse of a whole fortnight.

Parties of the islanders came from amongst the trees, and gazed at the newcomers from a respectful distance. Everything about the strangers was new to them—their dress, their complexions, their manners—but they did not exhibit any rude curiosity. They never made their visits obnoxious. In fact, one and all displayed a simple curiosity, that might very well have been copied by many of the *soi disant* higher civilisations.

The great majority stayed at a distance. Only the privileged few came up close. Of these last were Mytto and his father Maantee; and it was from them that our three Europeans were industriously learning the language of Erma and its sister islands. The tongue was, after the first few attempts, an easily pronounced one; and as its grammar was simple, and its vocabulary small, the trio made rapid strides. When one gives one's whole time and attention to learning a language, the task proceeds apace; but, even under the most favourable circumstances, there are some—"born linguists," one hears them spoken of—who pick it up faster than others. Sandy Carmichael was one of these, and whilst his companions were both labouring in the sloughs behind him, so to speak, he was able to reach back many a helping hand from the firm ground on ahead, and give them a friendly drag, which would help them on towards him.

"Have you found out what this king intends to do with us?" Sneyd asked him one day.

"King Oleron, so Mytto tells me, is waiting till we are all three thoroughly recruited. He does not wish to hurry us or anybody. 'When one year is finished,' he says, 'another begins. The world is very aged now, but it will be older before it dies.'"

"That's a lazy sort of motto," interrupted Sneyd.

"Faith, it has its charms, let me tell yez," remarked O'Neill, who was lying in his grass hammock, smoking placidly. "It's meself that never knew how pleasant doing nothing was before. Sure, it's born I was to be a gentleman, wid foive hundred a year, an' a man to stand at me elbow wid pipe-lights."

Being naturally one of the most restless and energetic men on the face of the earth, this remark of the Irishman's called forth a smile. However, when he had had his say, Sandy went on afresh.

"When we have got back our full health again, the King wishes us to visit him, and I think, from what Mytto and Maantee let drop, he intends to receive us with all the state he can summon up. That old prophecy rankles in his mind. He has got all the elder men to recall what they can of it, and all their accounts tally with his. The Ermans were warned centuries ago that white men should come to them from a great island in the east, and he is fully persuaded that we are the promised visitors. What he expects from us I cannot say, but that I suppose we shall learn in time."

"And about the priests," Sneyd asked; "what of them? Have they given up their amiable intention of making a

Parties of the Islanders came from amongst the trees.

meal of us, roast, boiled, or grilled? Or is all this high feeding simply to get us into good condition for the table?"

"We need have no fears on that score," responded Sandy. "You saw that tall blear-eyed man who came to pay his respects to-day. Well, he is Ebry, the chief of them. His functions are not altogether priestly. He practises the profession I dabble in. He likewise exercises evil spirits, and he is also head sorcerer of the island. His business is a very lucrative one, and he holds a considerable deal of power in one way and another."

"He's a treacherous, evil-minded blayguard, if ever I saw one," exclaimed O'Neill, raising himself on one elbow and expectorating in disgust. "Those shifty, bloodshot eyes never look yez straight in the face. He's squintin' all over everywhere whilst he's talkin' to yez. Mark me now, we'll have throuble from that sneakin', dirty, feather-bestrewn cannibal yet."

"I didn't like the looks of him either," said Sneyd. "But it won't do to show we take a dislike to the fellow. If he set himself to work our ruin, we can rest assured we should have our work cut out to foil him."

"I think," said Sandy, "he has gained his power more by fear than by love. I pumped Mytto on the subject, but Mytto is either very close, or praises the man up to the skies. When I say anything unfavourable of him or any of the other sorcerers, Mytto looks uneasily around him, and either remains silent, or contradicts what I have been saying, and

adds something complimentary about the fellows as a sort of counterpoise."

"I suspect," said Sneyd, "that Mytto has been told that sometimes trees and rocks have ears; or perhaps he has learned it from personal experience. However, the stocks and stones on Erma are deaf to English, whatever they may be to their own tongue, so we may make personal comments, in a crowd here as safely as we could in a desert elsewhere."

* * * * *

"I wonder how long," said O'Neill one day, "we are going to stay on this island?"

"If we wait for an English ship to take us off," remarked Sneyd drily, "I'm afraid our teeth will be worn out before it comes, although the food's for the most part soft."

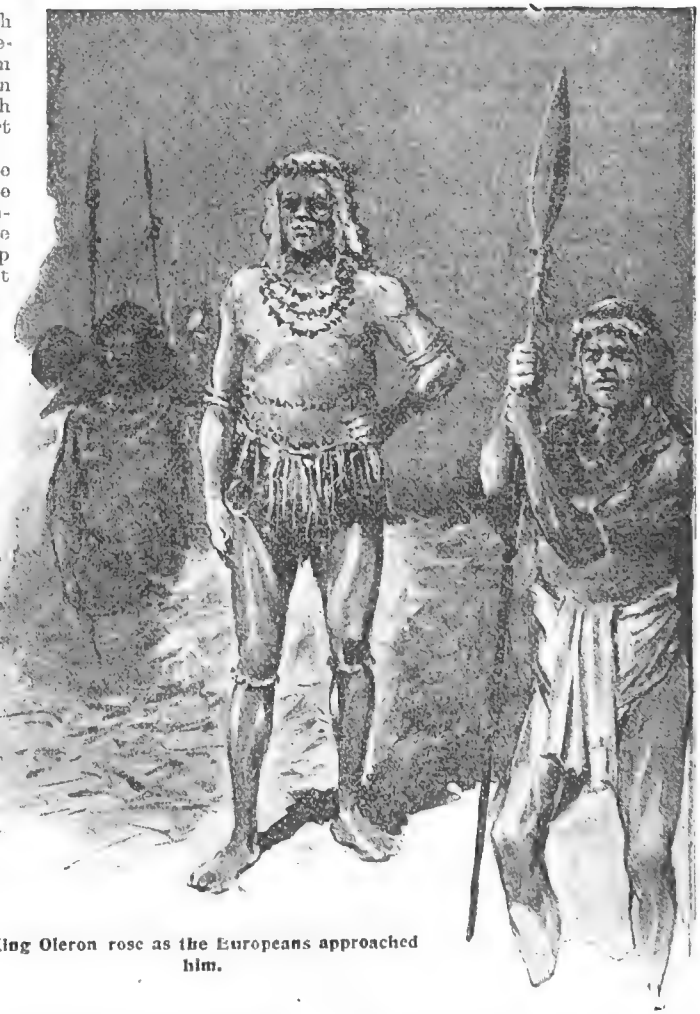
"I didn't imagine there was a regular packet service runnin'," replied the Irishman with a grin. "But we should be able to knock up some sort of a craft that would carry us."

"And so go home, aftercalling at Callao for another cargo of dollars?" suggested Sneyd. "The plan is a brilliant one, but it needs a great deal of maturing. We may be able to build a vessel some day, if such a thing be possible with one's fingers, and without a scrap of metal; but that won't be yet awhile. For the present we are alive, and that is a great deal to be thankful for. We are well treated, which is likewise a subject for gratitude. But on what footing we stand, time alone will show. We may be guests. We may be prisoners. We may be turned into soldiers. We may be made to air our Western knowledge and become tinkers, tailors, blacksmiths, carpenters. Everything depends, so far as I can see, on how Oleron receives us. If we make a good impression on him, so much the better; if not, so much the worse. I don't think our lives are in any danger, though in aboriginal communities, where human life is cheap, one can never be certain upon such a point. 'The favourite of to-day is the felon of to-morrow,' to quote one of Oleron's wise saws given to Sandy at second-hand by friend Mytto. But there is a vast deal of difference between a pleasant life and a hard one. Whilst we are compelled to live amongst these islanders, it would be far better to be their masters than their drudges. Besides, if we were the former, we might find means to build a vessel that would bear us away; but if the latter, we should have no chance whatever of doing such a thing."

"Then," exclaimed the Irishman, "it's meself that'll be dubbed knight at the very laste. Sir Murtagh O'Neill! Faith, it sounds dacenter than the names of better men I've heard. And we'll make Sandy a barrow-knight, and have as our one peer Lawrence, first Earl of Sneyd! Be the powers, av Oleron's got a crown to his name—av he's a rale king, I'm meanin'—'tisn't less he could do for such distinguished sthrangers."

CHAPTER II.

How King Oleron held a state reception: how the three principal visitors were invited to sorcery and luncheon: and how they criticised their host and his clan.



King Oleron rose as the Europeans approached him.

His Majesty King Oleron of Erma was sitting in state in the chief (and only) room of his palace. The palace was a wattle-walled erection some forty feet square, with a high-pitched roof, thatched with flat palm-leaves. It could be simply divided by hanging mats, into a number of smaller apartments; but at present all these barriers were taken down, and the whole was thrown into one large hall.

His majesty was seated cross-legged on a rush-strewn dais at the end furthest from the door. He was a venerable-looking man of about seventy, white-haired, and mild of countenance. On either side of him were grouped his chiefs, all armed with club and lance, and forming a sort of royal body-guard. Save for a gangway down the middle, the rest of the hall was filled with a crowd of islanders of both sexes. All these were decked out in their bravest gala attire—that is, in robes of vari-coloured *tappa*, with chaplets of lovely exotics, and necklaces of shells, for ornament. There were flowers everywhere. Beautiful orchids were strewn over the earthen floor; garlands of orange and lemon blossom hung from the rafters and perfumed the air. Even the King's venerable brow was not without its floral chaplet.

Up through this assembly the three strangers were conducted by the deputation which had been sent for that purpose.

"You do the talking, Sandy," whispered Sneyd, as they drew near the dais. "You are the best Erman scholar of the three of us."

"Oh, I can't," said Sandy, for once losing his habitual

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coolness. "I should never know what to say. No, you must answer him, and then, if you get stuck up for a word, I'll help you out. You know what to say. You're accustomed to this sort of thing. You've talked to the Prince when you were in his army. Whereas this is my——"

"First introduction to royalty, eh, Sandy? Well, I don't see that the court etiquette of unlucky Prince Charlie's camp, which is my only piece of experience in such matters, will be much of a guide for what to say and do here. However, we must try our best. I daresay they won't be over-exacting with strangers."

King Oleron rose as the three Europeans approached him, and laying his hands on the shoulders of each in turn, he touched the stranger's forehead with his own, five times, looking him steadfastly in the eyes meanwhile.

"White men," he said, "from the island whence is born the rising sun, from the land where we believe plenty reigns supreme, welcome to our shores. Though not unprepared for your coming, the exact time of your arrival was unknown to us. A prophecy, given from old to young through unreckoned generations, warned us that white men would come for our comfort, and long have we been expecting you.

"You yourselves doubtless knew not the fate that the gods had in store. Your frail bark got separated from the larger canoe which bore you to these seas, by accident. The finger of the gods led you out on to the trackless ocean. Food was withheld from you, and the clouds gave their rain but sparingly. Till my good Maantee and his canoes brought succour, you were in but sorry plight. Again, see the finger of the gods. Had you reached these shores strong, healthy, in full flesh, you would immediately have begun to repine. We are not as your countrymen. Our tribe is ignorant of many matters which are common knowledge with you. Seeing the depths in which we recline, you would straightway have longed to return. But coming amongst us weak, nerveless, and nigh unto death's door, you found rest, and all our hospitality could provide. No man withheld anything that was his to give. It has seemed to us that the fruits of Erma ripened but for our guests."

The King paused, and Sneyd replied in the most suitable words that came to his call. He thanked the King and his people for their hospitality, and hoped that he and his companions would find some way to requite at least a part of it.

King Oleron acknowledged this little speech, and then made a few more remarks, which Sneyd could not quite catch the drift of. Sandy, being applied to translated:

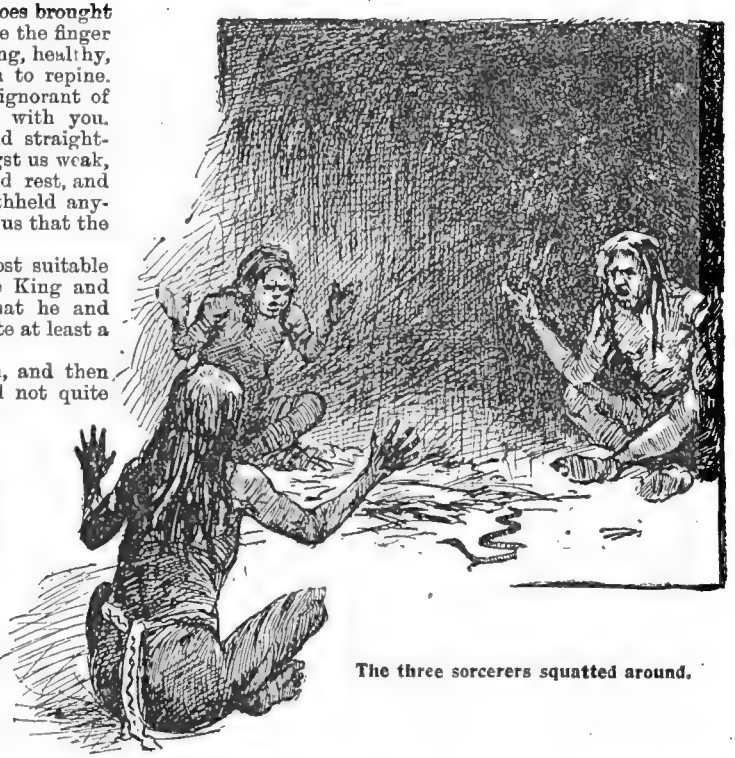
"His majesty says he will show us a short sorcery entertainment, and then hopes for the honour of our company at lunch."—At which free and easy rendering of the monarch's sonorous periods, Sneyd and O'Neill had much ado to restrain themselves from laughing outright. However, they preserved sober countenances, and, seating themselves by invitation on the daïs beside the King, watched what was going forward.

The crowd of spectators had pressed in closely to the wattled walls of the hall, leaving the vacant space in the middle occupied by Ebry and his two chief attendants only. Save for a scanty kirtle of snake-skin round the loins, the three were as naked as they were born, unless one counts heavy black hair, which hung lank and unbound as far down as the middle of their backs. Ebry himself was gaunt and lean. His eyes were lashless and bloodshot. His mouth was large and cruel. His nostrils were wide, and had a way of working in and out. Of the assistants, one was knock-kneed, tall, and melancholy-looking; the other, short, merry-eyed, and pot-bellied; an ill-assorted couple. But, as they soon showed themselves thorough adepts at their work, it may be taken for granted that Ebry knew what he was about when he enrolled them in his guild.

The whole stock-in-trade of the sorcerers was contained in a small covered basket of palm swathes. The ground was bare, and there seemed but little possibility of concealing anything about their persons.

I do not propose to give an account of the whole performance *seriatim*. But one item will serve to show how these knaves contrived to obtain credit for supernatural powers amongst their simple-minded fellow-countrymen.

A handful of short dry reeds was thrown on the floor, and the three sorcerers squatted round it (but at a respectful distance), and set up a droning, monotonous chant. The words were not "understanded of the people." They were not Erman. Very probably they were unadulterated gibberish. But they seemed to act as a spell, and have a creative effect; for presently the dry reeds began to rustle, and from them struggled out a small yellow snake. After a pause, a black snake followed, and then a white one with blood-red spots, and after him, a yellow one with green stripings. Once away from their apparent birthplace the snakes, wriggled across to Ebry, received a caress from his hand, and coiled down peaceably on the floor. Other snakes followed the first in rapid succession, the pile of dried rush diminishing gradually as they came; but at last, when there must have been at least a couple of hundred reptiles in view on the floor, the supply seemed to cease. There were scarcely a dozen of the dead straws left, and these were apparently incapable of metamorphosis.



The three sorcerers squatted around.

Having got this large supply of material before them, the three conjurors changed their chant to a livelier one, which set the reptiles into violent commotion. The three Europeans fancied that the first process was about to be reversed. But the play was not ended. There was apparently method in the writhings. By slow degrees, and after many futile attempts, a number of the snakes raised themselves on their tails, each twisting round and lending

support to the others. More reptiles spiralled up, and got into position on the top of these, and others above them, till at last the whole two hundred had woven themselves into one living rope of gleaming, breathing bodies, supported solely by its lower end.

Ebry got up, and apparently tested the soundness of the column with his hand. It swayed. A frown crossed his face, and he set up a lively air, which seemed to make the living items of the column bind closer together. He tried it a second time. It was firmer now, but still apparently not strong enough for his purpose, for he broke out with the new song again with redoubled vigour. This at length seemed to have effect; for at the third trial the rope refused to budge, even though the chief sorcerer strained at it with his shoulder till the muscles of his spare body seemed to be bursting through his dark skin.

Standing erect again, and looking at his handiwork for a moment with a satisfied smile, he turned round, and nodded at his shorter assistant. The little pot-bellied man, scrambled to his feet, and advancing to the shining column laid his hand upon it.

"Howly Saint Pathrick!" ejaculated the Irishman, "av yez could have been spared to see this day, 'tis the great destruction yer honour 'ud have made. Av that Dutch bowed little haythen isn't climbin' them live shnakes, may I never handle honest blackthorn more!"

It was as O'Niell had said. With infinite trouble and caution, the stout little fellow was working his way up, finding resting places for toes and fingers in open jaws, and to judge by an occasional grimace which flashed across his rotund features, not unfrequently pricking himself on a projecting fang. Yet the living rope did not budge an inch to his weight, nor did any of the snakes composing it offer to do him the least harm. Unobstructed, he climbed to the top, and, sitting on the blunt point, wiped the perspiration from his brow.

Up to this point, except from the movements of their eyes which flashed and glinted like so many diamonds, it would have been impossible for an onlooker to declare that the reptiles were alive. But now Ebry set up a shrill whistling, and a strange thing happened. The outside snakes resting on the ground unravelled themselves, climbed up, and settled themselves on the fat man's body. One by one, the other snakes forming the pillar followed their example, till the fellow was enveloped in a mass of glittering, sinuous bodies which completely shut him out of sight.

And—here comes the weirdest part of it—the whole, reptiles and man, were apparently suspended in mid-air.

There was no support to be seen hanging from above, and there was certainly no prop from below. It was a marvellously clever piece of jugglery.

"Begob!" exclaimed O'Neill, who was all in a cold sweat, "he's never goin' to lave that dirty bundle stuck up in the air like a new moon, is he?"

"I shouldn't imagine so," returned Sneyd, "but if you wait you'll see. Look, he's lighting a fire now."

The sorcerer had produced a couple of neat little faggots of wood from his basket, which he set light to, apparently, by the simple process of striking them together. Waiting till they blazed clearly, he threw them on the ground, beneath that grotesque evidence of his handiwork which was still balanced in mid-air, and stood back to watch the result.

A clear, yellow, smokeless flame shot up to within a yard of the lowest snakes. In a minute or so, two or three, unable to bear the heat, fell off into the fire, which hissed, and burnt up more fiercely as each writhing body toppled into it. One by one, and sometimes in clusters of five or six, the remaining snakes fell into the blaze and were consumed, and, at last, all had come down. But where was the man? Nowhere in view. There was no visible means of scrambling on to the rafters, which were fully eighteen feet over his head. Indeed, he could not have escaped observation if he had done so, for the sorcerer's fire was a smokeless one, and even the tongues of flame, which were semi-transparent, did not mount more than eight or nine feet from the ground at their highest.

O'Neill had a solution of the mystery in his own mind, for he muttered, "Gobbled up by them sarpints, ivery bone of him, poor misdirected haythen;" but his two companions were not prepared to accept this, and awaited developments.

Ebry had extinguished his fire, and, whilst he carefully collected the ashes into a heap, his remaining assistant went outside, and returned with a large hollow sphere of closely-woven wicker-work. It was so light, that he threw it from the door to the centre of the hall with one jerk of the hand, and the one orifice in its surface was not more than an inch in diameter. Into this small hole, Ebry poured the ashes through a funnel of palm leaf, going over the ground with minute care, time after time, so that not a particle should be left behind. Then, extracting a gourd from his basket, he poured into the sphere a pint or two of colourless liquid—water, probably—and immediately squatted down on his heels, and began to chant. His knock-kneed assistant, *vis-à-vis* to him at the other side of the sphere, took up the chorus vigorously at intervals, and the pair of them then bawled so lustily, that the rafters above rattled again. At the end of a minute or so, the sphere began to tremble, its movements becoming more and more pronounced, till it rolled away a couple of yards, and remained still. The song ceased. A cracking noise was heard. The pot-bellied assistant tore aside the walls of his shell, and stepped out on to the hard, earthen floor.

Without waiting for applause or reward, the sorcerers left their traps, and marched out of the hall, and the crowd began to scatter.

"Well!" said the Irishman, "this beats all my goin' a-fishin'. What's a bhoy to believe av he can't thrust his own eyes? I see that fat little spalpeen go aloft, as clear as I see his honour the King sittin' down on his hunkers beside us. I see them bastely sarpints cover him up. I see the sarpints fall down, one by one, an' made sure it's ate he was. And now here he is again, as lively as a dog-fish, an' twice as ugly."

"Ebry is more than man," said the King in the Erman language.

"Ebry is a precious sight less than man, to my way o' thinkin'," remarked O'Neill in his own tongue. "There must be a sthrong cross of the snake in his breedin'. An' being brought up wid a dacent hatred o' reptiles, 'tis meself that's going to give him a wide berth."

"Well, don't pass any more comments just now," said Sneyd, "or some of these good people will be making a shrewd guess at the gist of your remarks. You've rather an expressive face, O'Neill, and there's Mytto I can see for one who has been reading it."

"Mytto's welcome to what he's seen. It's the dacent bhoy he is, and he'll not be afther runnin' about makin' mischief. But here's that ugly baste Ebry himself coming back, and whilst he's contagious I'll kape me figure-head as wooden as Sandy's own."—With which wise remark, Murtagh O'Neill relapsed into silence.

The scene of the feast was not roofed in by a cover of man's thatching. The Ermans ate their state repasts *sub Jove calido*. To ward off the too piercing beams of the tropical sun, they had chosen a spot in a palm grove, where the great leaves interlaced overhead, and formed a cool, deep shade. The soft, springy turf had been covered with freshly plucked ferns, whose aromatic stems, when bruised underfoot, diffused a delicious odour. Upon two long rows of sort brown mats the feasters reclined or sat, facing one another. Between these were thick, over-lapping layers of *pooroi* leaves, forming a neat green table-cloth. The table appointments were simple. Knives and forks there were none. A broad banana leaf, with the mid-rib withdrawn, served each feaster as a plate; there was a half cocoanut full of sea-

water at his elbow, by way of salt; and fingers did the rest, unless he liked to use a piece of bread-fruit, roasted crisp as toast, to assist in conveying the food to his mouth.

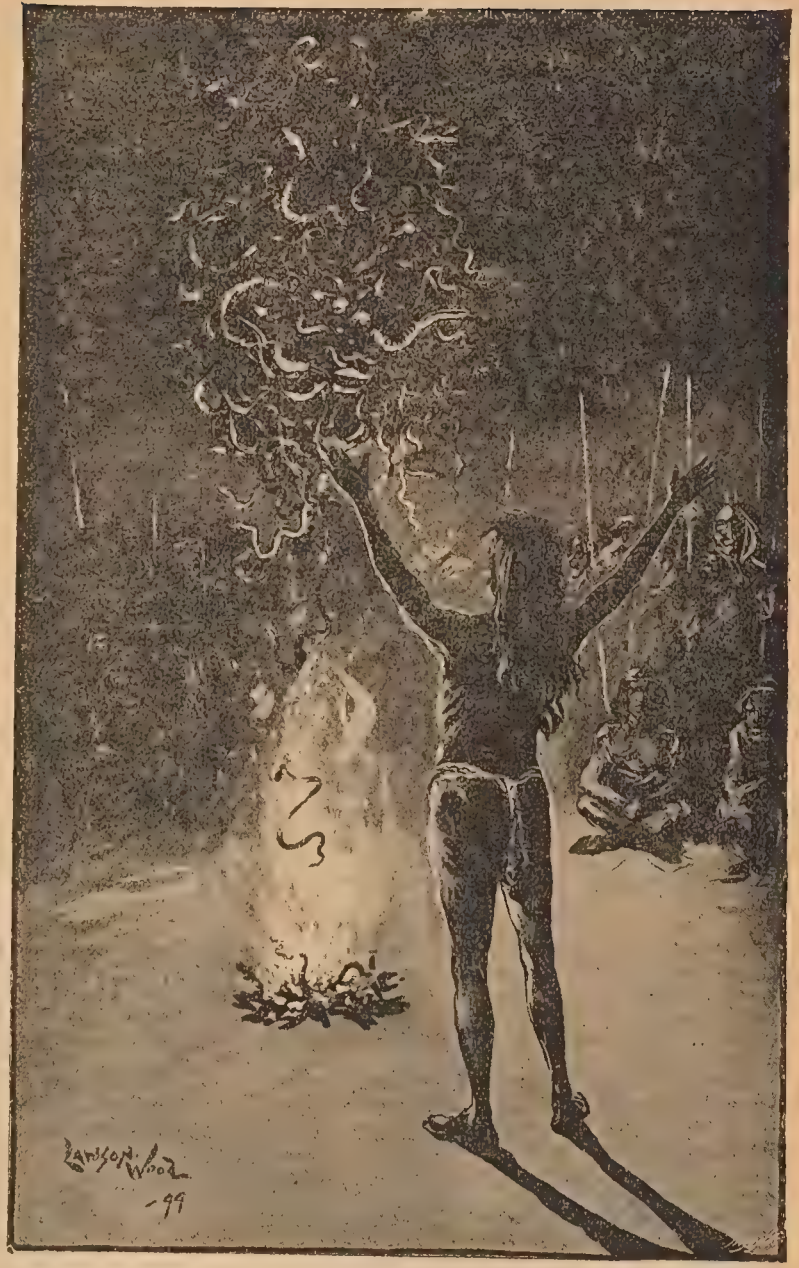
The food was in barbaric profusion. There were huge calabashes containing fowls, lobsters, prawns, and fish. Each portion was wrapped in folds of leaves, and was served up smoking hot from an adjacent earth oven, done to a turn. There were great gourds full of yellow *poce*, a pudding made from the mountain plantain. There were others of *feeiis*, a sort of turnip, pounded to pulp, and baked with cocoanut milk. There were pyramids of young cocoanuts, unhusked, and punched ready for drinking, piled up like shot in an arsenal yard. And in and amongst the other viands were great stacks of ripe fruit—portly bananas, in bright buff jackets; avees, with cheeks like a blushing girl; luscious guavas, with the shadows of their ruddy pulp flushing through a transparent skin; delicate, thin-skinned oranges, tinted in patches a rich nut-brown; and here and there a great, jolly alderman of a melon, which rolled about from very portliness. Such a heap! fairly bursting with condition, like the rich tropical soil from which they sprung.

The three Europeans could not use their fingers as the *habitués* did. The islanders conveyed each morsel to their mouths without soiling any part of the hand beyond the mere finger-tips. When the guests attempted to imitate them, they found the grease trickling down to their very elbows. But such trifling matters of detail affected nobody very much.

The excellence of the feast absorbed undivided attention. The prawns and lobsters were delicious. The fish and fowls were beyond compare. The method of cooking in the ground, though slow and tedious, preserves all the juices, and renders the meat so treated exceedingly sweet and tender. The roasted bread-fruit was as crisp as toast. The fruits were a poem; and the juice of the young green cocoanuts was cool and refreshing as iced champagne.

The feast ended, attendant Hebes spirited away the *débris*, and then others, a choir of island sirens, sang a rhythmical, monotonous chant, which, being in keeping with the surroundings, was thoroughly pleasing.

Everything had a restful air. There was no hurry and bustle, either in earth, air, or amongst the inhabitants thereof. The trade-wind soughed gently amongst the trees, wafting their scents across the grove. The pendant orchids swung slowly hither and back. The faint but deep diapason of the surf, pounding on the distant barrier-reef formed a fitting bass for the sweet tender treble of the singers.



One by one the snakes fell into the fire.

Sneyd and O'Neill, at any rate, were enjoying themselves.

There was a flavour of the lotus in the dish; but the taste was not displeasing to them. Sandy Carmichael alone of the company was restless. His recent life on board ship had not prepared him for such slothful indulgence; and certainly the former training of Duncan Carmichael had been far too austere to put him in tune with it.

(*To be continued.*)

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THE TIMMINS TROUBLES.

VIII.

Mr. Timmins and the Sticking Plaster.

"My dear," cooed Mrs. Timmins as she rushed into her husband's dressing-room, tripped over the water jug, and butted him furiously in the back, "have you got them again?"

"Got 'em again," yelled Mr. Timmins, as he dug his razor into his chin, and upset the scalding water over his hand, "got what?"

"My keys, of course," put in Mrs. Timmins sweetly.

"That's it," gurgled Mr. Timmins, dancing round the room and pressing both hands to his chin. "D'ye think I've taken your keys to shave with? P'raps you think I can't scrape along without them. Don't stand grinning there, bring me some plaster. Quick! Don't you see I've cut myself? Can't you understand I've ploughed off half my chin?"

"Oh, let me see," screamed Mrs. Timmins, dancing up to him and grabbing at his arm. "Gracious, what a nasty scratch! Wait a minute and I'll get some plaster."

"Think it is, do you?" raved Mr. Timmins, grinding his heel on the floor. "Call it a scratch, do you? I like that. I like to hear you sweetly chattering whilst I bleed to death. Don't hurry. It won't make any difference, you know. You wouldn't like to say you left me at the last minute, would you? Maybe you like to see the blood. P'raps you think the colour suits me!" and Mr. Timmins stopped for want of breath.

Mrs. Timmins shot into her bedroom. "Where can I have put that plaster?" she moaned, as she trod on the cat's tail and knocked her head against the mantelpiece. "I put it—oh, where did I put it?"

"Hurry up, can't you," roared Mr. Timmins, rolling on the couch in agony. "No, on second thoughts I wouldn't hurry, it might spoil your record. You only want a little more steam, and Mr. Bosmo Consor as director, to be a South-Eastern express. Court plaster, I say. Bring me that court plaster before I pull down the wall and get some from the neighbours."

Just then, Mrs. Timmins remembered. It occurred to her she had hid the plaster in the clock. "Here it is, dear," she said. "Don't make such a fuss. I can't get it quicker than I can," and she snapped a bit off and handed it to him.

"That's it," cried Mr. Timmins, "p'raps you think I don't want my hand to hold my chin. P'raps you'd like to see the gore flow down my neck!" And Mr. Timmins took away his hand and a little drop of blood oozed out. Then he put the plaster on his tongue and pressed hard upon the cut.

When he had sucked off half the gum and swallowed it, Mr. Timmins picked out the plaster. "Come off that," he croaked, as the sticking plaster formed an attachment for his finger. Then it stuck to the other finger.

"Oh, you would, would you?" yelled Mr. Timmins, as he jabbed away at the cut. But the plaster was new at the work, and hung close to the digit. Mr. Timmins began to get a little ruffled. He was an amiable man by disposition, but this was a bit too much.

"What's the matter with the measly business? Come off, I say!" And as he plucked the plaster off his finger it grew to his thumb. "Stick, will ye?" he shrieked, pressing it to his cut with all the energy he could muster. "Leave go that thumb!" and he whirled round on his heel and pegged away again.

As he turned he caught sight in the glass of Mrs. Timmins giggling. He turned on his trembling wife.

"You think I'm a variety show, do you?" he yelled, stamping his foot on the ground. "Maybe you think I'm doing this for fun. What are you laughing at, anyway? Have you never seen a bit of plaster stick before? Who asked you to stop at all? How can I see to put the thing on while you're standing in the light? Perhaps you think you only want a piece of putty and a sash with the paint off to make you a window pane." And Mr. Timmins stopped for a minute to take breath.

"And who asked you for a leech?" he went on, his voice rising with his temperature. "Can't you bring me something that knows the difference between a finger and a chin when it sees 'em?" and he jammed his finger on the cut again.

"Shall I cut you another piece, dear?" asked Mrs. Timmins mildly. "Would you like to try a fresh strip with more stic ky on it?"

"No, I wouldn't," shouted Mr. Timmins. "D'ye think I want to make my dinner off that beastly gum? Haven't I sucked enough already?" He worked away again, and this time the plaster slipped off suddenly, and stuck to the corner of his mouth.

"That's right," said Mrs. Timmins pleasantly, hoping to secure peace in the family, "that's capital now."

"You think it is, do you?" raved Mr. Timmins with a fearful grin. "Maybe you think the mouth was cut by the razor. P'raps you're under the impression that this hole in my visage was meant to be shut up with a little bit of plaster. Come off, will you? Let go that mouth, or I'll call in the police!" And as he gave the plaster a wipe it stuck to the back of his hand.

"Let me try," put in Mrs. Timmins; "I know exactly how to do it."

"Then why didn't you say so before? Why didn't you do it at first?" roared the wretched man. "What did you want to wait for till I'd lost nearly every drop of blood in my body? Oh, you know how to do it! Of course you do!

"You only want a little Gregory powder and some death certificates to be a doctor. You'd just love to pull it all about, and make it bleed again. I know you. Stand off there, can't you? Stick, you grinning rascal!" And Mr. Timmins clapped the wrong hand over his jaw. "I'll hold you there till you do stick, if I have to hold you there till my wife learns something."

And Mr. Timmins pranced up the room again, his face full of emotion and expressive of the most stern determination.

"Do let me have a look, ducky," pleaded Mrs. Timmins, waltzing round him.

Gently she drew away his hand and substituted a piece of plaster with a deftness which did her credit.

"There, I thought my piece would stick that time," screamed Mr. Timmins with a delighted chuckle, looking at his hand and finding the plaster not there. "You always come in after the funeral. You're always only, only, only just too late. So like a woman."

"I fancy you'll find your bit of plaster on the other hand," said Mrs. T. pleasantly.

"Of course you know," snorted Mr. Timmins, having ascertained by a covert glance that his wife was right. "If I had your foresight and a glass I'd put a brass plate on my front and be a 'metalogical' office, and forecast the weather."

And Mr. Timmins, who evidently meant meteorological, wore that piece of blood-stained plaster all day rather than admit by taking it off that his wife had been right for once.

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The - Final - War.

BY LOUIS TRACY.

CHAPTER LI.

The Electric Rifle.

A glance at the accompanying map will show that Lord Roberts had well chosen the position of his advanced lines. He practically held the whole of the Seine Valley in front of the forts at Marly and Cormeilles, two of the strongest fortified posts in the *banlieue* of Paris.

Had the French been wise enough to convert the Plateau de l'Hautie, on the north bank of the Seine, into another Plevna redoubt, as they had always intended to do since the Franco-German War of 1870-1, the British would not so easily have gained a footing in close proximity to the outer ceinture of the fortifications of Paris.

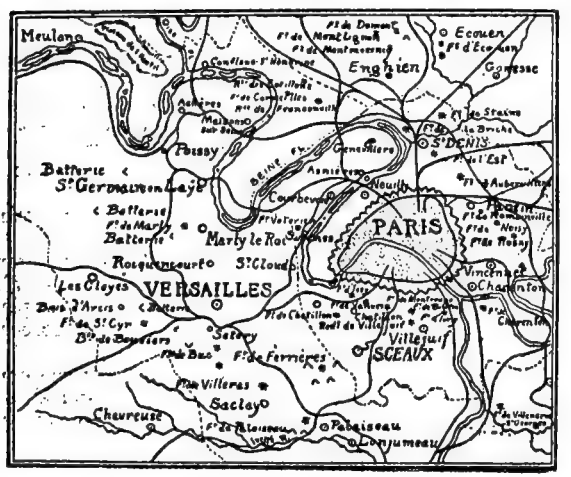
But the Germans were at Versailles almost before the Parisians realised that the investment of their beloved capital was really about to be accomplished, and now the English Moltke had gripped the city whilst its inhabitants were still talking of driving him into the sea.

Nevertheless, the task essayed by the British Commander-in-Chief was infinitely more arduous than that set to his predecessor.

The Germans were called upon to besiege a strong fortress which required investing lines of forty miles in length: Lord Roberts, to achieve his ends by the same means would need to inclose a circle of 125 miles.

To state the nature of the undertaking is to demonstrate its impracticability, and the hero of Kandahar was not the man to waste time upon the impossible. Paris was either to be carried by a *coup*, or not carried at all.

Already arrangements were in progress for strong reinforcements to be sent from the two German expeditions, now set at liberty, and Sir Redvers Buller was rapidly making his way through Southern France. But the skilled soldier who had borne the brunt of war well knew that if his plan succeeded he had enough troops and to spare for the purpose. If it failed, he was in no worse position than before, as he did not intend to uselessly spend the lives of his men once he became convinced of the inutility of his project.



Delay was consequently undesirable. It only gave the enemy time to put his house in order; and if the sole means of subjugating France was to ignore the capital for a time and continue to overrun the provinces, it was obvious that the non-success of an assault in no way altered the general situation.

General Saussier, the Governor of Paris, and generalissimo of the French forces, considered that his adversary had placed himself in an untenable position by occupying the Achères-Poissy line.

It will be seen that, as the bird flies, a direct assault upon the environs of Paris was out of the question. Three times does the Seine interpose its sinuous course between the Achères plateau and the walls of the capital.

Every position north and south of the river is covered by forts deemed impregnable. The French commander scouted the idea of an attack by the south, with Marly, St. Cyr, Versailles, Chatillon, and the rest blocking the way, whilst a rapid crossing at Conflans, with the objective of a northerly attack by the St. Denis side, although the only remaining method open for an advance, was surely impossible through country dominated by such strongholds as Cormeilles, Cotillons, Franconville, Montmorency, Montlignon, and Domont.

In a word, General Saussier and his staff were in absolute ignorance of Lord Roberts's intentions or their conceivable development, so they contented themselves with perfecting the telephonic and telegraphic communications between the outlying forts and the inner circle, with its three huge entrenched camps, and there waited impatiently until a definite move by the assailant might enable them to crush him with greater certainty.

They had not long to wait.

When Lord Roberts had armed two Special Service Corps, of 50,000 men each, with Mr. Thompson's electric rifle—this being its common but misleading name—and their commanders, Generals Massy and Alleyne respectively, were able to assure him that the troops were perfectly acquainted with its novel properties, he resolved forthwith to put the weapon to the supreme test of active service.

There could be no question of its efficiency. Repeated experiment had demonstrated this beyond the domain of doubt. The one point that could only be determined by a battle was its moral effect upon the enemy.

Here, it is true, opinions differed, but Lord Roberts believed in the invention as fully as did Lord Wolseley, and both distinguished soldiers were more enthusiastic in this respect than Mr. Thompson himself, for he modestly declaimed the authority of an expert in warfare.

It is now time to disclose the exact nature of this remarkable arm, whose prime quality was that it rendered hostilities by night far more deadly than during a similar battle by day.

Mr. Thompson had left the Lee-Metford magazine rifle untouched internally. He had only added a small but intensely powerful electric lamp, which fitted easily on to the flanges of the back-sight.

So far there was nothing in the idea save a neat adaptation of the search light, with its motive power derived from a simple, tiny, and well-constructed battery, charged with a voltage sufficient to burn for four hours if constantly in use. A spare coil, carried with the ammu-

nition, could readily be applied by the soldier whilst in action. Thus eight hours of continuous service was secured, and it was computed that even in the hottest engagement the intervals obtained by the fact that each shot fired extinguished the light automatically until it was again brought into play by the user, would yield a total period of twelve hours' duration of service.

But Mr. Thompson was a skilled optician, in addition to his professional attainments as an electrical engineer.

What he had done, unaided, was to solve the many problems attending the refraction of light.

An ordinary search lamp invariably spreads its beams in a V, and even this concentration is only obtained by reflectors, which compel the rays to travel in a definite direction, rather than follow their natural diffusion towards all points of a sphere.

After years of untiring endeavour this quiet and unassuming genius had discovered a means of refracting, or literally breaking, the rays of light, by passing them through a double prism at their only avenue of outlet, whereby they all travelled in almost parallel lines.

The result was that at a distance of fifty, eighty, or even one hundred yards, the radius covered by the powerful illuminant within the lamp did not exceed a circle of six inches in diameter.

It was a mere matter of adjustment to obtain the subsequent result that a bullet fired from a rifle accurately fitted with one of these lamps should lodge in the centre of the area covered by the light.

It did not matter how the rifle was held or fired. Let that murderous ray rest for an instant upon any appreciable object the pressure of the trigger made it mathematically certain that in the same fraction of a second the projectile was lodged in the precise locality illumined by the lamp.

There could be no mistake, or deviation, or wavering.

If the holder of the weapon were gifted with ordinary eyesight, he could be quite positive that where the light fell, there could he strike.

No wonder, then, that Lord Roberts was eager to try this portentous arm under its own peculiar conditions—for the darker the night, the more effective it became—now that Lord Wolseley fully approved of his telegraphed resolution to attack Paris immediately.

There were no guns of position with the British army, for the reason already detailed—that a regular siege of the French capital at this stage of the war must have savoured of the grotesque.

On the fifth day after the memorable sortie, when Lord Roberts had received intelligence of the sailing from Hamburg of 50,000 men of the Duke's forces, and the whole of the recently arrived contingent from the United States and Canada, he gave orders for a strong artillery attack to be made on the French positions dominated by the Forts de Cormeilles, des Cotillons, and de Franconville.

To engage in a duel with the magnificent ordnance contained in those fortresses would, of course, only mean the annihilation of the British field guns. But by constant change of position, by utilising the cover of trees in the well-wooded ground on the left bank of the Seine, and by constant effort to discount the range of the stationary monsters in the fixed batteries, the British gunners were able to avoid considerable loss whilst very materially annoying the French infantry.

Two British divisions were also sent to the front to keep things moving, and when he heard the news General Saussier exclaimed, whilst being lifted on to his horse:

"St Denis, then! It is well. These English will be butchered."

In the north, the French army was agog with excitement. Train after train conveyed troops along the railway of the Grande Ceinture, and an imposing army of soldiers quickly gathered at Enghien, behind the fort now intermittently engaged by the British artillery.

Lord Roberts paid not the slightest heed to the proceedings in this quarter.

At midday he inspected the two Special Service Corps, which were drawn up on some level land close to the Seine at Poissy.

He was fully satisfied with the appearance and constitution of the twenty strong brigades into which they were divided.

At midday he inspected the two Special Service Corps.

They were soon dismissed from the parade and advised to take complete rest until 8.30 p.m., when a good meal would be served to them.

A general muster was ordered for 9.30.

It was eleven o'clock before the sounds of continuous firing by the French pickets at St. Germain en Laye apprised the defenders of any more towards the south.

And it was here that the British received their first convincing impression of the terrible effect of the new rifle.

When they came to close quarters with a French division they found that instead of indulging in the desultory and uncertain nature of fighting in the dark, they could act with a precision that could not possibly be attained during the hours of daylight.

Not only did every missile lodge in the body of an opponent, but there was no wild and indiscriminate firing; ammunition was not thrown away, and effective response was impossible, as the piercing rays from the lamps blinded their opponents whenever they strove to come to close quarters.

To say that the French were seized with panic would be to do an injustice to brave and determined men. They were simply bewildered, amazed, unable to grasp the significance of the infernal device which smote them so infallibly, yet offered no tangible explanation of its frightful qualities to their scattered senses.

Regiments simply melted away before those demoniac rays that brought death the moment they were sighted.

A hasty retreat behind the Fort de Marly was not so much a terrified rout as a yielding to the unseen and inevitable. Men could not stand before this unknown element in warfare; they fled or died.

Prior to the attack the Commander-in-Chief had most carefully revised the complete scheme of operations with the divisional Generals and their brigadiers. The first division was charged with the capture, if possible, of the formidable Fort de Marly, with its seven huge batteries. Special brigades were told off to deal with the two strong redoubts on its left and the battery in rear.

The second division, led by Lieutenant-General Alleyne, when assured of the probable success of Massy's undertaking, in which it bore no part, was to march with all speed over the next five miles and attack the Battery and Fort of St. Cyr, the Batteries des Bouviers, and the two Forts de Buc.

By field telegraph the Commander-in-Chief should be constantly apprised of the progress of events, and 200,000 men were ready at midnight to march off to complete the occupation of all positions taken from the enemy.

Everything, of course, in this remarkable programme depended upon the demoralising influence of the new arm, but it was not to be expected that the troops could unaided climb bastions, cross outworks, and *glacis*, or swim ditches.

Each brigade carried with it a large number of light but solid gangways, constructed upon the principle of a fire-escape. With these the broadest moats and the highest walls could be surmounted either on the level or at a steep gradient. The wheels were so arranged that one gangway

could cross over another, whilst three of these novel scaling-ladders, placed side by side, formed a fairly broad road.

The first experiment was made with the detached battery lying three miles north-west of the Fort de Marly.

It was taken whilst its guns were still roaring forth their opening message of defiance.

There was no earthly chance of a reasonable defence being made. No portion of a human body could show itself on bastion or in embrasure, but an ounce of lead was promptly planted therein.

A company of Zouaves flung themselves desperately down an escarpment to prevent a lodgment being affected by one of the scaling ladders. They were shot down to a man within half a minute.

The first real difficulty presented itself when the leading division reached the precincts of the gigantic Fort de Marly. Here a number of search-lights swept the landscape and gave the gunners an opportunity to make good practice at a distance.

They were shot down to a man.

The British loss was severe during the advance, but the moment that the attackers got within striking distance the position was at once reversed.

Acting under the orders of their officers, the men devoted their attention solely to the apparatus of the searchlights. When these were turned upon the assailants, both officers and men were promptly rendered powerless by the glare, but from precisely the same cause a strong shadow was cast on the machine for the benefit of those not within its radius, and a few telling shots sufficed to knock it to pieces.

Thenceforth the work degenerated into mere slaughter.

The hopelessness of the business infected even the bravest spirits in the French army. From out of the gloom a man suddenly perceived a jet of bright light dart towards him.

It flashed for an instant upon his breast, or arm, or head, or thigh, and quicker than consciousness itself came the dull crunch of a projectile, the vivid ray disappeared in the void whence it sprung, whilst the surrounding darkness deepened into insensibility, perchance into eternity.

So sudden and awful were the different attacks and so unexampled in the rapidity of their final achievement, that General Saussier might rave and storm as he chose at his telegraphists—they could seldom get a second answer from the locality indicated by the first message which announced the advance of the British.

From the Fort de Marly several communications of a vague and conflicting nature were received, as the extent of its area demanded a protracted conflict before it could be occupied even under the weird and uncanny conditions of this unprecedented conflict between helpless humanity and implacable science.

"The English are attacking in force, but are suffering heavy loss under our splendid fire," clicked the telegraph.

Five minutes later:

"Regret to inform you that No. 3 Battery and the Moscow Redoubt have been captured."

"What folly is this?" roared the astounded General. "Captured? Is it an affair of pigeons, then? Ask that ma'man to leave the instrument."

"It is but too true," came the reply in answer to a furious question. "Colonel Berthier attempted their recapture, but survivors say that everyone is bewitched Nos. 1, 2, and 5 batteries have fallen. The Commandant is here. He wishes to say——"

Silence.

Never again did General Saussier get word or sign from the superb fort that controlled the wide plateau of Marly, save the stern summons sent to him at dawn, when its guns were turned upon Mont Valerien and Meudon.

The telephone from Versailles was even more dramatic.

Although the chief of the staff of the Fifth Army Corps was in personal communication with his leader, he could say nought of value. The noise of the fighting to the north could be heard plainly enough, but the officer was quite unable to explain the sudden cessation of the big guns at Marly, or the wholly unaccountable collapse of its associated batteries and redoubts.

General Saussier was at St. Denis, many miles from the scene of action, and he was nearly beside himself with rage. He thundered fierce questions and fiercer denunciations along the wire, but his auditor could only answer that he had sent off many mounted messengers to make inquiries.

At last he assured the chief that there could be no doubt concerning the fate of St. Germain and Marly. They were held by the British, but how or why this unwarrantable collapse had occurred he could not tell.

Ha! more news. Versailles itself was attacked. Now he could promise precise intelligence. There was heavy firing at the front. Troops were being hurried up in support. They were so numerous and so skilfully disposed that the British must be hurled back.

What was this? A retreat! Yes, a disgraceful panic. Men rushed by saying that the English fought with bottled lightning.

Sorry, but he must really go outside and take his position with the troops.

He did not replace the receivers upon the switches, and his perplexed inferior, now quite dumfounded with surprise, plainly heard the sounds of musketry, the cries of the combatants, and the indescribable noise of conflict.

But these indications of passing events soon died away and Versailles was thenceforth mute.

Saussier thought he must certainly be losing his wits when in rapid succession came news of irreparable disaster at Bouviers, de Buc, Bois d'Arcis, and Satory.

It was now almost dawn. Surely something could be done. Were the unparalleled fortifications of Paris made of gossamer then, that they fell thus before the breath of the invader's nostrils? He must go personally and ascertain the precise extent and significance of the night's transactions.

A special train brought the French leader and his staff by the inner circle railway to the Fort d'Issy, and here they awaited the growing daylight with an impatience and dismay ever heightened by the receipt of disjointed reports, all couched in the phraseology of unexplained but complete disaster.

He thundered fierce questions along the wire.

Troops might gallop, or march, or be carried by train across Paris from St. Denis, or Pantin, or Vincennes, pouring in seemingly countless multitudes towards the south-west—when they reached Chatillon and Vanvres they only found themselves subjected to a pitiless hail of lead from fortifications which yesterday were the brass bosses upon their apparently impenetrable shield.

And if one night of mysterious horror could achieve so much, what might not the next witness.

General Saussier hoped that his self-torturing questions would be answered by a friendly bullet.

CHAPTER LII.

Paris Taken.

"Will you not sleep, sir, for a little while?" said a member of Lord Roberts' staff, as he gazed anxiously at the deep lines and haggard expression in the Chief's face during a momentary lull in the furious artillery duel that had been in progress all day between the Forts de Buc and D'Issy.

They were seated in a bomb-proof building within the first-named fortification, and had been eagerly scrutinising a complete plan of the southern defences of Paris which was found in the Commandant's quarters.

Long had they pondered over different expedients, until the English general's weary eyes, which he had not closed in rest for thirty-six hours, refused for the time to carry to his active brain the meaning of the lines and dots and shaded sections that signified so much, yet were so complex in their minuteness.

"Try and lay down for at least an hour," urged his sympathetic companion. "You may break down to-night, and think what that means to us."

Lord Roberts smiled—so pleasantly that for an instant the shadow of overpowering responsibility was driven from his brow.

"It is very good of you, Everett," he said. "I will follow your advice if you tell me what rest means."

Rest, with his iron grip on Paris, with 400,000 British troops even now making final preparations for the supreme effort of the campaign, with half a million of frenzied opponents bracing every nerve to repel the blow which they knew must fall that night—rest, with the thoughts of the civilised world centred upon the undertaking to which he was committed — rest under such conditions could only be found in reckless abandonment to all-engrossing work.

To strive to court sleep would be but to yield to maddening anxiety.

So Colonel Everett did not press the point, nor did he attempt a definition.

After shading his eyes with his hand for a brief space, Lord Roberts continued:

"Saussier, of course, is cramming every available man into Southern Paris between the Seine at Point-du-Jour and the Pont National."

"That may be regarded as certain," assented the other.

"It is the best thing he can do, in our interest."

"May I ask why you think so, sir?" said Colonel Everett, somewhat surprised by the remark.

"Because his troops will learn more easily the full details of last night's operations. What should you think, Everett, if you knew that when darkness fell you would be attacked by a courageous enemy whose mere coming meant death, by some mysterious device, to every combatant encountered?"

"Well, sir," said that officer with a laugh, "for my own part I should look to you for orders."

The Commander-in-Chief waved aside the compliment. "Under such circumstances," he replied, "I fear that my only plan would be to head the first regiment detailed to meet the assault."

"If that be Saussier's notion," said Everett, "our men will oblige him readily, for he is as big as the side of a house. They can't miss him."

At this moment the conversation was interrupted by the entrance of Lieutenant-General Alleyne.

"I came along to assure you," he explained, "that the Special Service Corps is eager to be at work again. My chief difficulty has been to keep out the crowds of volunteers to fill our small casualty list, and Massy tells me——"

"Why aren't you in bed?" demanded Lord Roberts suddenly.

"In bed!" The divisional leader spoke as though he had never heard of such a locality.

"Yes. Be off at once and get some hours' sleep. A nice mess we shall be in if you are knocked up to-night. And tell Massy the same thing. Not another word, please. See me here at ten."

His lordship evidently feared that his companion might say something when Alleyne had retired, for he added peremptorily:

"Get me the parade states, Colonel Everett, from every division to hand, and ask the Intelligence Department to clearly mark on a sketch map the present location of every brigade."

Colonel Everett met the Adjutant-General outside.

"Don't say a word to the Chief about his looking tired," he whispered, "or he'll snap your head off."

The Adjutant-General got safely away, and was succeeded by Harington.

Now, Lord Roberts had a soft place in his heart for the handsome young guardsman, from whom all traces of his recent disablement had disappeared, and as he really felt thoroughly fatigued, he said, graciously enough:

"Tell me, Harington, what you would recommend. I cannot sleep, but I want a pick-me-up."

Teddy looked at his superior, and noted his utterly worn appearance. As usual, he came straight to the point.

"If I were you, sir," he said, "I would have a good wash."

The Chief was delighted with the notion. It had never struck him. By rummaging around they discovered the materials, and when a blissful moment of relief had come from a liberal application of cold water, his lordship suddenly cried:

"Had another letter from the girl to-day?"

Harington was ready this time.

"Yes, sir," he answered. "Irene is a marvellous woman. I don't believe anyone but herself could have got a note through from the hospital depôt to-day, or even found out where I was. But it turned up all right an hour ago."

"Did she say anything special?"

"Only that she hoped I would not be hurt during the street fighting in Paris to-night."

"Ah, she thinks we'll get there, then. Anything else?"

"Nothing of general interest, sir."

If anxiety blended with confidence and happy augury was thus to be found within the British lines, a very different state of affairs obtained in the beleaguered city.

Four of the five great railway termini on the north bank of the Seine were crowded with terrified fugitives. Pretence was now thrown to the winds, and distracted men, resolved personally to stay and give their lives in defence of the capital, were nevertheless madly endeavouring to dispatch their loved ones to places of safety.

Appalling scenes occurred at the Gare de l'Est and Gare de Vincennes, which were thronged with frenzied multitudes, and matters became so serious that at last the railway authorities imperatively demanded military protection, and refused to send out any more trains.

(To be continued.)

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IN FRIENDLY CONVERSE

N. I.—There is no pay attached to the Premiership, because it is not an office under the Crown. The Prime Minister usually holds some office and draws the salary attached to the position. Thus, Lord Salisbury is Secretary for Foreign Affairs. The post generally occupied is that of First Lord of the Treasury.

Liber.—The public libraries of Europe contain a total of 23,000,000 volumes; those of America are credited with a total of 50,000,000.

S. C.—A German meteorologist says that the early years of the next century, now so close, will have extraordinarily hot summers. He arrives at this conclusion from a theory which he has evolved concerning the weather. During certain periods of time, ranging over something like fifteen years, there is a series of warm years and one of cold years, during which the summers become increasingly hot and the winters correspondingly mild, and *vice versâ*. Of course, when the height is reached the heat or cold diminishes, and he is of opinion that the maximum heat is approaching.

J. P.—Jaffa is the seaport of Jerusalem; that is, it is the port to which go and come those things which are sent to and from the Holy City. It is about forty-seven miles from Jerusalem, and is one of the oldest cities in Asia. Indeed, Pliny says it existed before the Flood, and others derive its name from Japhet, the son of Noah.

Dia.—The following is given by an expert as an easy way of testing the genuineness of diamonds: Make a dot with a lead pencil on a piece of paper and look at it through the diamond. If the dot shows clearly, the stone is good; but if it appears scattered, or if you see more than one dot, your diamond is not genuine.

B.—The only Poet Laureate compelled to resign the position was John Dryden, who was appointed in 1670, and resigned upon the accession of William and Mary. This was not for incapacity, but for religious and political reasons.

H.—The humming bird, according to an eminent authority, can fly backwards. The bird almost lives in the air, in which element it performs all kinds of evoluti ns with the greatest ease.

D.—Your friend is right; the county of Durham did not have the power of sending representatives to Parliament till 1673. That was owing to the fact that it was a county Palatine, and was under the jurisdiction of its Bishop. The supremacy of the Bishop was such that on several occasions an army was raised by him in the Palatinate.

H. F.—By no means. Many bacteria, instead of being harmful, are beneficial, and act as scavengers in our internal economy, thus preventing disease. We have it on high authority that the flavour of the butter and cheese made in Essex and Devonshire is due to the presence of bacteria, and up to the present time I have not heard that these products are particularly injurious.

Art.—It has been estimated by a large dealer in artificial limbs that about 30,000 persons in the United Kingdom have lost one or both legs.

A. T.—Bath money forms an important item in the Turkish marriage contract. The intended husband agrees to allow the lady a certain sum for bathing purposes; if this is at any time withheld, she has only to go to the cadi and turn her slipper upside down. That official at once investigates matters, and, if the grievance is not redressed, it is considered a good ground for divorce.

C. B.—The most costly tomb in the world is that erected for Mahomet. The diamonds and other precious stones with which it is decorated are worth £2,000,000.

Right.—The right hand, which is more sensitive to the touch than the left, is less sensitive than the latter to heat and cold.

"Who was it who said that he knew a city where the inhabitants dwelt on the tops of trees, and to which city did he refer?" Thus writes N. E. V. ———Erasmus, the philosopher, thus described Amsterdam. The tree-tops are the piles on which the buildings are erected. The palace, built in 1618 as the town hall, rests on more than thirteen thousand piles. Amsterdam, one of the most important of commercial cities, rests literally on tree-tops.

L.—The depreciation of the value of the silver currency, through waste of metal in circulation of the various pieces, is estimated to be equal to £11,000 annually.

N.—The system you mention is adopted in the German schools. There the bright pupils are separated from the less capable ones and pass to higher studies, while the others plod on to the best of their ability. In this way the dull pupils are not crammed injuriously, and their cleverer schoolfellows are not retarded in their progress. Medical men do the sorting.

H. K.—The custom of burying or depositing the heart of a prominent man in some place quite apart from the rest of his body is not altogether dead, even in highly civilised countries. The heart of Gambetta, the French statesman, was deposited under a statue erected in his honour eight or nine years ago in Paris.

D. W.—In the convent cemetery of St. Petersburg there is a grave or tomb which is simply a glass house with a crypt. In the latter rests the infant daughter of wealthy parents, who had the body embalmed and placed in a coffin with a pane of glass inserted in the lid just over the face. For years they visited the crypt daily. They are now dead, but are buried elsewhere.

O. D. is alarmed—unnecessarily—at the rapid growth of his finger-nails, and would like to know what is the usual rate of growth———Physicians say that the nails grow at the rate of about one thirty-second part of an inch a week, so that in eight weeks they will have grown a quarter of an inch. There is nothing to be alarmed at, however, in a higher rate of growth.

C. K.—The reduction of a penny per pound in the duty on a commodity like tea is a serious matter for the revenue. A few years ago, when the duty was reduced by twopence, it meant a loss of over a million sterling in the year, or about 1 per cent. of the total revenue.

K. L. P.—The reference you saw to the high prices of pieces of music was in *Pearson's Weekly*. Most of those you mention, however, you may obtain for the low sum of twopence halfpenny per copy from Mr. T. Holloway, of 78 New Oxford Street, London, who has arranged to supply them to readers of *S. S.* at this price. If you will send a postcard to the address given you will receive a complete list of songs included in this offer, and if you wish to obtain a large number of them, special terms are offered.

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9ft. by 9ft.	7/6		12ft. by 15ft.	15/9
9ft. by 10½ft.	8/6		12ft. by 18ft.	19/6
9ft. by 12ft.	9/6		12ft. by 21ft.	22/6

When ordering, please mention if for Bed, Dining, Drawing, or Sitting Room, and any particular colour preferred.

A Reversible "Prudential" Hearthrug (Reg.), to match above Carpets, sent for 1/6 extra, size 2yd. long and 1yd. wide. Special Offer, Three Hearthrugs for 4/3, or Six for 8/-, or Twelve for 15/6, sterling value.

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